MOST VOLUBLE PLAYER

Gary Sheffield Speaks His Mind

SI's 2004 BASEBALL AWARDS

by TOM VERDUCCI

Roger Clemens: Another Cy Young

Sports Illustrated

SPECIAL REPORT

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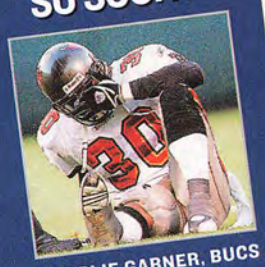

CHARLIE GARNER, BUCS

Freshman Adrian Peterson (Texas-born) is Oklahoma's newest weapon

SATURDAY SHOWDOWN

Oklahoma vs. Texas

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USC vs. Cal

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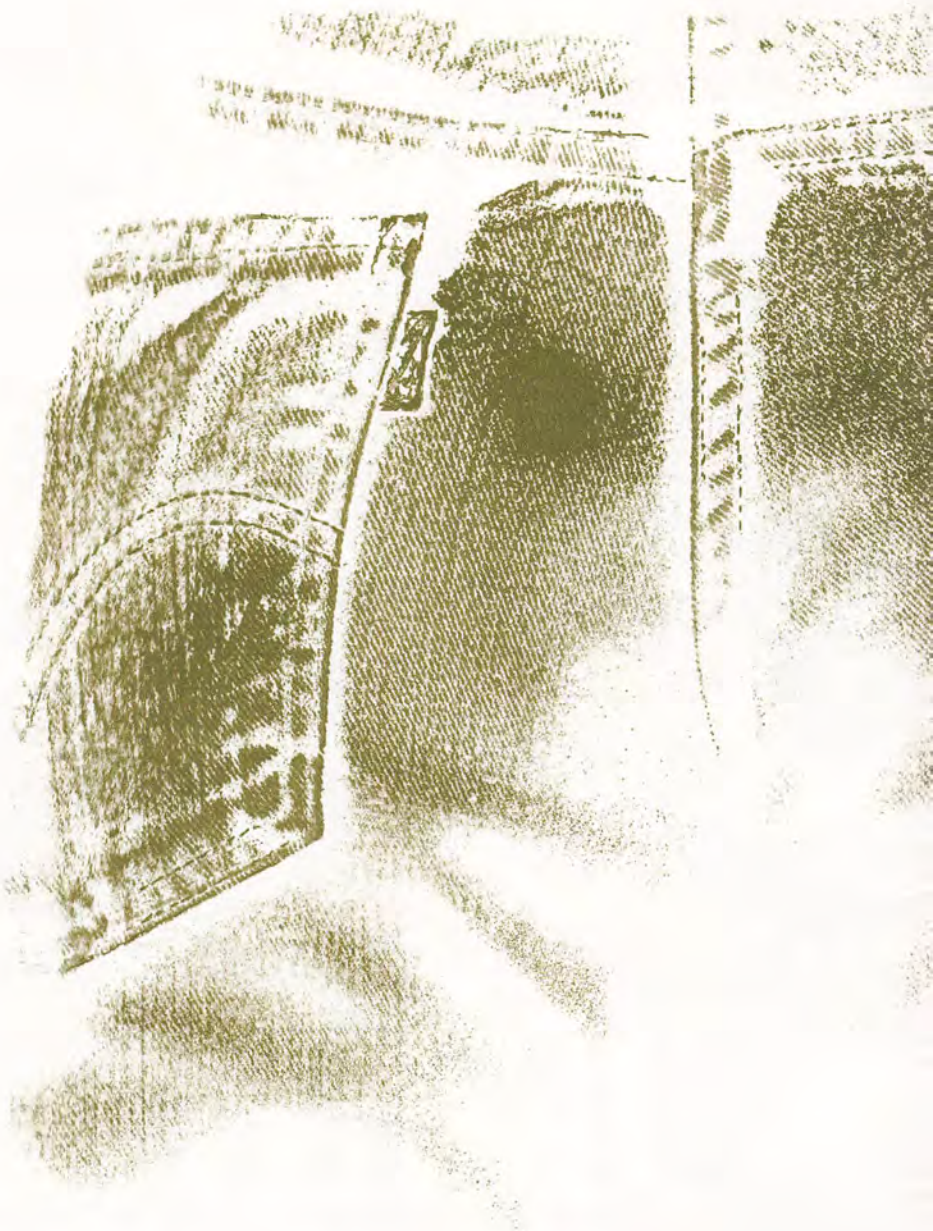

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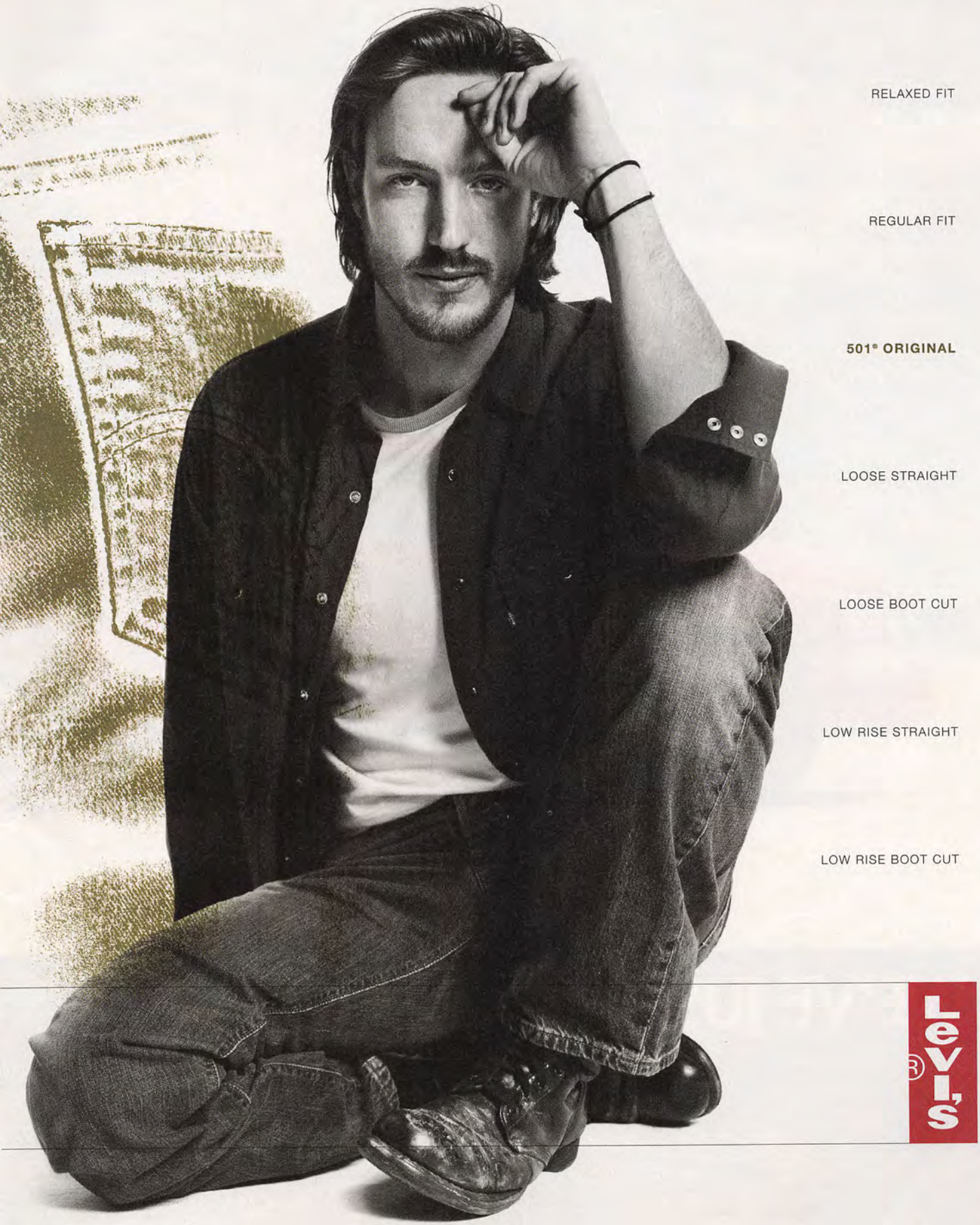

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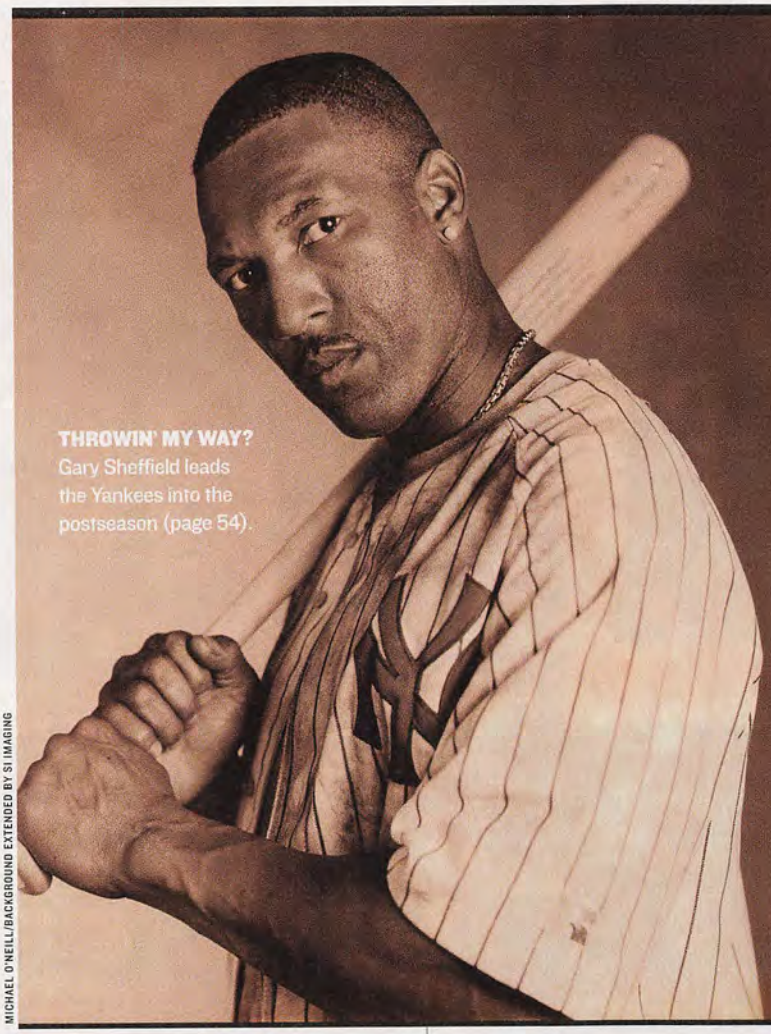
The Lineup



THROWIN' MY WAY? Gary Sheffield leads the Yankees into the postseason (page 54).

MICHAEL O'NEILL/BACKGROUND EXTENDED BY SI IMAGING

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN BIEVER
INSET PHOTOS: Michael O'Neill (Sheffield); Al Tielemans (Clemens); Robert B. Stanton/Wireimage.com (Garner)
COVER FLAP: Terry Reinna/AP (Earnhardt); Simon Bruty (Georgia)

SI Extra

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Leading Off

The Hits Keep Coming

Seattle Mariners rightfielder Ichiro Suzuki was particularly pleased to be standing on first base last Friday after getting his 258th hit of the season (inset, left)—a ground ball up the middle—which broke the record set by St. Louis Brown's first baseman George Sisler (below, right) in 1920. Ichiro finished the season with 262.

Photograph by Dan Levine/AFP/Getty Images

JEFF CHIU/AP

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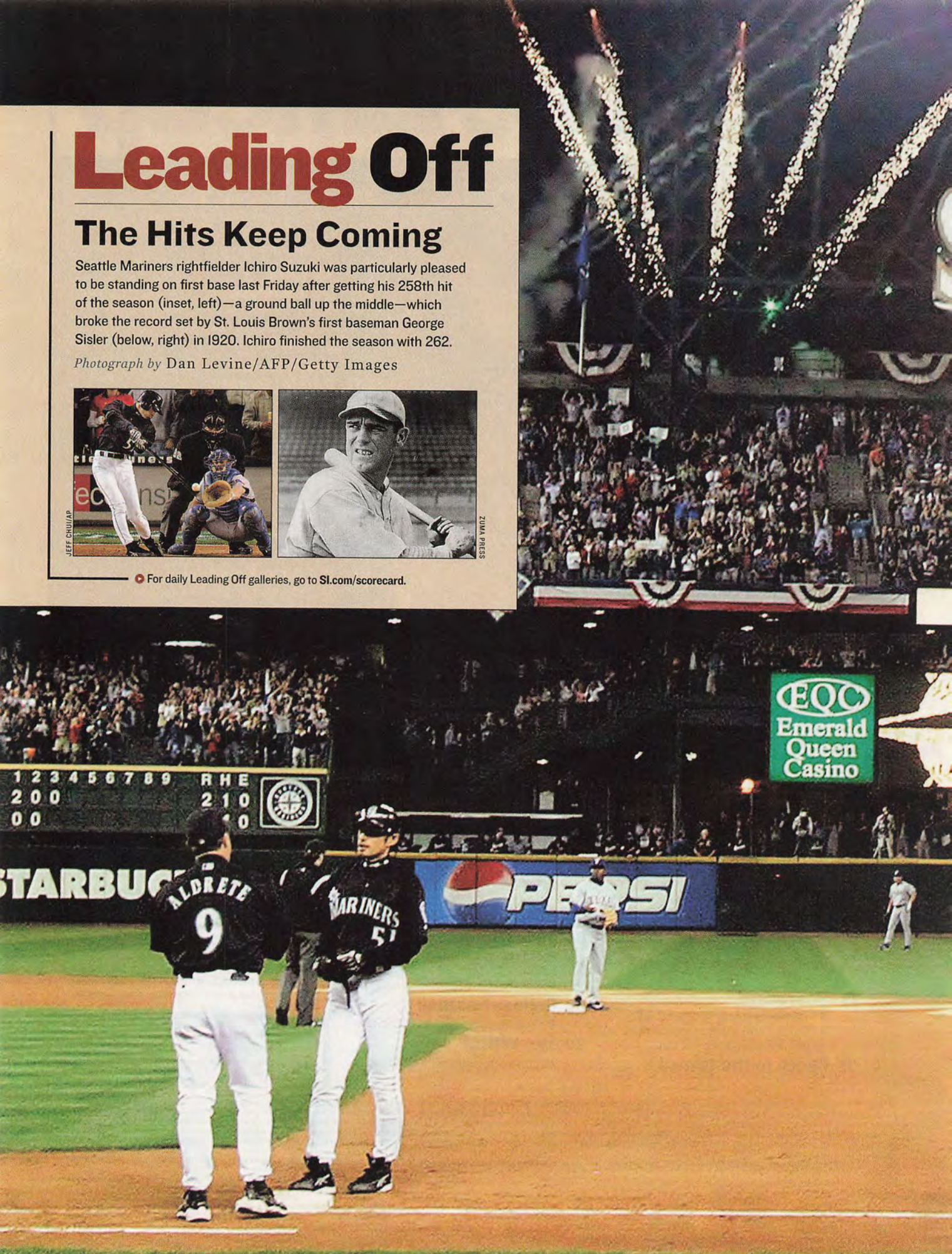
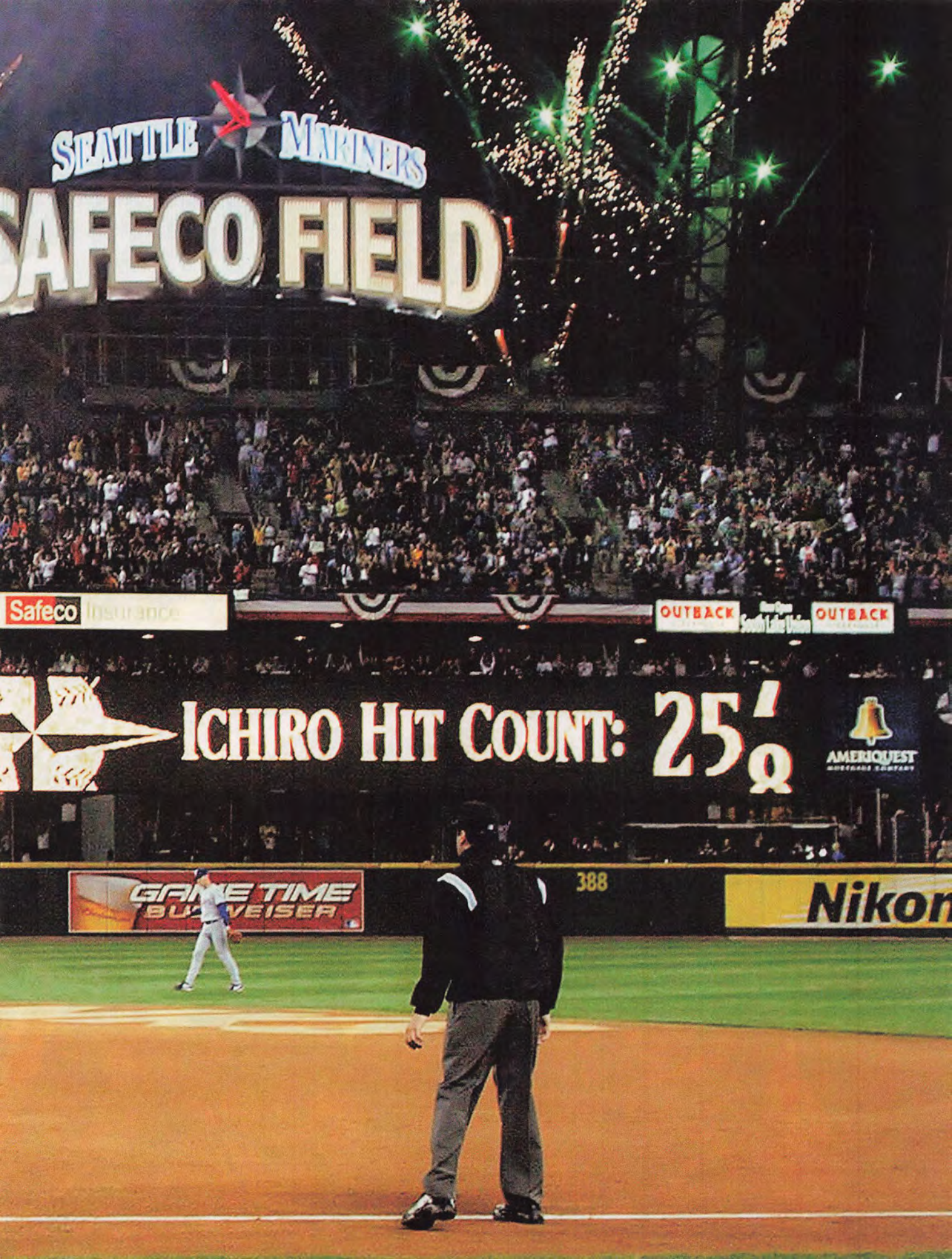
For daily Leading Off galleries, go to **SI.com/scorecard.**

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Leading Off

Storm Cloud

Seattle Storm forward Lauren Jackson (left) and teammate Janell Burse battle for a rebound against Sacramento Monarchs forward DeMya Walker and center-forward Yolanda Griffith (33) in the first game of the WNBA Western Conference finals at Arco Arena in Sacramento last Friday, which the Monarchs won in overtime, 74–72. The winner of this series will take on the Connecticut Sun in the Finals.

Photograph by Greg Nelson

MONARCHS

Leading Off

Downright Uprights

Virginia Tech's Corps of Cadets protect its collapsible goalpost from zealous fans after the Hokies upset the sixth-ranked West Virginia Mountaineers 19–13 in Blacksburg, Va., last Saturday.

Photograph by David Bergman

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Finally! I've been an Atlanta Falcons fan for 25 years, and during that time there had never been a cover featuring a Falcon in uniform, until now (Sept. 20). Even their magical 1998–99 Super Bowl run didn't make the cut.

Pete Riendeau
Attleboro, Mass.

As soon as I pulled the magazine out of my mailbox and saw Michael Vick on the cover, I stuck it back in and went inside. Other athletes had a great opening week as well, but no Tom Brady, Daunte Culpepper, Curtis Martin or even Chad Pennington? Brady once again showed up Peyton Manning and garnered only a comment in Who's Hot (SI PLAYERS). When are these other guys going to get cover time and well-deserved praise?

Angel Morton, Richmond

Winning Players

Thank you, thank you for creating the SI PLAYERS section (Sept. 20). I went to college with Eagles defensive end N.D. Kalu. One day, as I sat with him at lunch, it struck me that here I was, talking to a future NFL draft pick about normal, everyday things. Yes, star athletes, like many celebrities, live lives that most of us can only dream of. But it's nice to be reminded that they too put their pants on one leg at a time.

Joel Allan, Los Angeles

Quick, get me the unintended irony department. Ty Law's workouts are very impressive, but the more lasting impression is his quote, "I don't have a problem leaving everything behind—my cars, my jewelry, my comforts of home—and just concentrating on myself." How courageous of him to sacrifice those things that bring him pleasure and instead dedicate his efforts to . . . himself!

Dave Tuchler, Northbrook, Ill.

Let Barry Be Barry

With award-winning journalists like Rick Reilly taking cheap shots at Barry Bonds (THE LIFE OF REILLY, Sept. 20), no wonder Bonds is less than pleasant to the media. Treat him with respect, and perhaps he'll return the favor.

P. Frederic, Chicago

It's too bad that Bonds is three of Rick Reilly's least favorite people, but who really cares? Quite honestly, I wouldn't walk across the street to shake Bonds's hand, but I will pay to sit in the stands, watch a couple of swings (if he gets the chance) and go home. Isn't that what it's all about?

Scott Lee, Kansas City, Mo.

Where is your eye for art? Barry Bonds is the Michelangelo of baseball. Quit dumping on the artist, and appreciate the magnificence of his work. We won't see another like him again.

Alan Johansen, Pleasanton, Calif.

A gifted, pampered and high-priced athlete gets dogged for most of his career by unsubstantiated rumors of performance-enhancing drug use. After being harassed by members of the media over this issue, the athlete has been known to lash out at these sanctimonious journalists. Despite the constant badgering, the athlete continues to dominate his sport, all the while rewriting the record books. Barry Bonds? No, try Lance Armstrong. Reilly really ought to drop his double standard.

Robert Miller, Roseville, Calif.

Tall in the Saddle

Gary Smith's article on the African-American polo players in Philadelphia was one of the best stories I've read (*The Ride of Their Lives*, Sept. 20). Lezlie Hiner's devotion to these children is an inspiration and a reminder of what really matters in life: love and faith and hope. The tragedy of Mecca's death is heartbreaking, but it did not break the spirit of this courageous group of people. It would certainly be tragic if Hiner's work had to be cut short. She may not have much materially, but she has much love to share. If only we had more like her in this world.

Anna Belcher, New Haven, Conn.

Hiner is an inspiration, crossing boundaries, both color and economic, while asking for nothing in return but the joy of seeing her pupils excel at life. The only thing Smith left out was where to send donations for a worthy cause that must keep its doors open.

Matthew Zuckerman, Long Beach, N.Y.

• Donations may be sent to: Work to Ride, Chamounix Equestrian Center, 98 Chamounix Dr., Philadelphia, Pa. 19131, or online at www.worktoride.net. —ED.

Thanks for making me even more proud of my sport. Polo is not, however, such an unlikely sport for these young men to be playing. Anyone who plays can tell you it's more about grit and horses than about stuffed mushrooms and flowered hats. Polo has survived for more than a thousand years on the fierce devotion of its players, all of its players.

Richard M. Foxx, Indian Wells, Calif.

I'll be honest. I had no interest in reading a story about polo, with or without inner-city kids. But when I finally got around to reading it, I couldn't put it down. I now realize that stories like this are the reason I keep renewing my subscription.

Robert Beiderman, New York City

As a former Philadelphian, I find it sad but typical that Hiner and her kids are being evicted from their stable. And they call Philadelphia the City of Brotherly Love?

Kelly Whalin, Ardmore, Pa.

Give me more stories like this and fewer about high school students with Hummers and an entourage flocking to the NBA.

Lee D. Wilder, Atlanta

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Ollie Matson, Two-Sport Star

OCTOBER 7, 1957

AS A COLLEGIATE and professional athlete it seemed as if nothing could stop Ollie Matson. In 1951, his senior year at the University of San Francisco, he led the nation in rushing (1,566 yards) and touchdowns (22), helping the 9–0 Dons to their best season ever. The following summer he won two track medals at the Helsinki Olympics—a bronze in the 400 meters and a silver in the 4×400 relay—then began a 14-year NFL career. A six-time All-Pro at running back, who also was a standout defensive back and kick returner, Matson joined Jim Thorpe as the only athletes to earn an Olympic medal and induction into the college and pro football halls of fame.

But Alzheimer's has done what few competitors could do: slow the speedy Matson, who has been battling the disease for five years. Even so, at 74 he remains in good spirits at his home in Los Angeles with Mary, his wife of 50 years. Two months ago Matson traveled to the College Football Hall of Fame in South Bend, where he was among the honorees at a breakfast celebrating college football's ties to the Olympics.

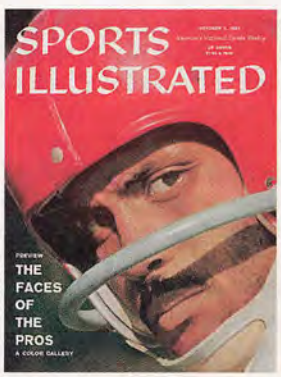
Matson calls the undefeated USF team "the greatest of all time." Eight teammates would join him in the NFL, including two—linemen Gino Marchetti and Bob St. Clair—who also would be enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Yet the Dons were not invited to a bowl game because it had two black players: Matson and linebacker Burl Toler. Moreover, without the revenue that a bowl would have provided, USF's struggling athletic department was forced to cancel the football program on Dec. 30, 1951.

A first-round pick of the Chicago Cardinals, Matson delayed signing until after the Olympics. The Trinity, Texas, native ran the 400 final in 46.94 and had a 46.70 leadoff leg on the relay team that ran faster than the world record but finished second to Jamaica.

Matson was an All-Pro as a rookie, and his all-purpose skills were so highly regarded that, in an unprecedented trade, the Los Angeles Rams gave the Cardinals nine players to get him in 1959. Matson later played for the Detroit Lions and Philadelphia Eagles.

After retiring as a player in '66, Matson was a physical education teacher and football coach at Los Angeles High, then coached the running backs at San Diego State. He later served as events supervisor at the L.A. Coliseum for 11 years, retiring for good in 1989. Though his short-term memory often fails him, Matson still enjoys his family—four grown children and eight grandchildren—and swims and plays an occasional round of golf. *—Joe Lemire*

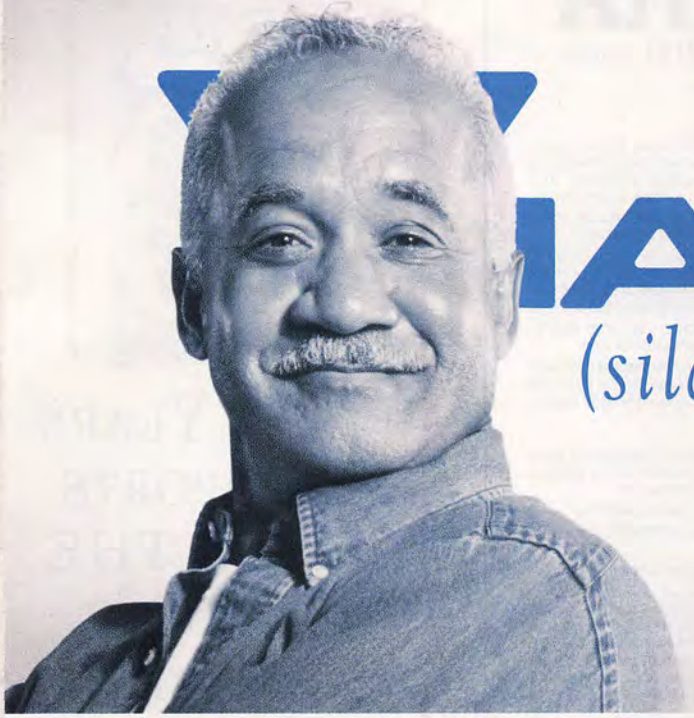
One of two Olympic medalists elected to the college and pro football halls of fame, Matson is now battling Alzheimer's.



TEAMWORK Ollie and Mary have been married for 50 years.

JOHN G. ZIMMERMAN (COVER); TODD BIGELOW/AURORA

Get back to mischief.



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The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, facial flushing, and upset stomach. Less common are bluish or blurred vision, or being sensitive to light. These may occur for a brief time. Remember to protect yourself and your partner from sexually transmitted diseases.

Talk with your doctor first. Make sure you are healthy enough to have sex. If you have chest pain, nausea, or other discomforts during sex, seek medical help right away. The same is true if you have an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. Call for help at once.

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* For some men, in as quickly as 10 minutes; for most, in under a half hour (statistical significance at 14 minutes). In this study, VIAGRA responders, given 100 mg 2 hours after eating, were timed to see how fast they got an erection that enabled them to have sex.

† Data on file. Pfizer Inc., New York, NY

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PATIENT SUMMARY OF INFORMATION ABOUT VIAGRA®

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This summary contains important information about VIAGRA®. It is not meant to take the place of your doctor's instructions. Read this information carefully before you start taking VIAGRA. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you do not understand any of this information or if you want to know more about VIAGRA.

This medicine can help many men when it is used as prescribed by their doctors. However, VIAGRA is not for everyone. It is intended for use only by men who have a condition called erectile dysfunction. **VIAGRA must never be used by men who are taking medicines that contain nitrates of any kind, at any time. This includes nitroglycerin. If you take VIAGRA with any nitrate medicine your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe or life threatening level.**

• What Is VIAGRA?
VIAGRA is a pill used to treat erectile dysfunction (impotence) in men. It can help many men who have erectile dysfunction get and keep an erection when they become sexually excited (stimulated).

You will not get an erection just by taking this medicine. VIAGRA helps a man with erectile dysfunction get an erection only when he is sexually excited.

• How Sex Affects the Body
When a man is sexually excited, the penis rapidly fills with more blood than usual. The penis then expands and hardens. This is called an erection. After the man is done having sex, this extra blood flows out of the penis back into the body. The erection goes away. If an erection lasts for a long time (more than 6 hours), it can permanently damage your penis. You should call a doctor immediately if you ever have a prolonged erection that lasts more than 4 hours.

Some conditions and medicines interfere with this natural erection process. The penis cannot fill with enough blood. The man cannot have an erection. This is called erectile dysfunction if it becomes a frequent problem.

During sex, your heart works harder. Therefore sexual activity may not be advisable for people who have heart problems. Before you start any treatment for erectile dysfunction, ask your doctor if your heart is healthy enough to handle the extra strain of having sex. If you have chest pains, dizziness or nausea during sex, stop having sex and immediately tell your doctor you have had this problem.

• How VIAGRA Works
VIAGRA enables many men with erectile dysfunction to respond to sexual stimulation. When a man is sexually excited, VIAGRA helps the penis fill with enough blood to cause an erection. After sex is over, the erection goes away.

• VIAGRA Is Not for Everyone
As noted above (*How Sex Affects the Body*), ask your doctor if your heart is healthy enough for sexual activity.

If you take any medicines that contain nitrates – either regularly or as needed – you should never take VIAGRA. If you take VIAGRA with any nitrate medicine or recreational drug containing nitrates, your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe level. You could get dizzy, faint, or even have a heart attack or stroke. Nitrates are found in many prescription medicines that are used to treat angina (chest pain due to heart disease) such as:

- nitroglycerin (sprays, ointments, skin patches or pastes, and tablets that are swallowed or dissolved in the mouth)
- isosorbide mononitrate and isosorbide dinitrate (tablets that are swallowed, chewed, or dissolved in the mouth)

Nitrates are also found in recreational drugs such as amyl nitrate or nitrite ("poppers"). If you are not sure if any of your medicines contain nitrates, or if you do not understand what nitrates are, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

VIAGRA is only for patients with erectile dysfunction. VIAGRA is not for newborns, children, or women. Do not let anyone else take your VIAGRA. VIAGRA must be used only under a doctor's supervision.

• What VIAGRA Does Not Do
- VIAGRA does not cure erectile dysfunction. It is a treatment for erectile dysfunction.
- VIAGRA does not protect you or your partner from getting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV — the virus that causes AIDS.
- VIAGRA is not a hormone or an aphrodisiac.

• What To Tell Your Doctor Before You Begin VIAGRA
Only your doctor can decide if VIAGRA is right for you. VIAGRA can cause mild, temporary lowering of your blood pressure. You will need to have a thorough medical exam to diagnose your erectile dysfunction and to find out if you can safely take VIAGRA alone or with your other medicines. Your doctor should determine if your heart is healthy enough to handle the extra strain of having sex.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you:
- have ever had any heart problems (e.g., angina, chest pain, heart failure, irregular heart beats, heart attack or narrowing of the aortic valve)
- have ever had a stroke
- have low or high blood pressure
- have a rare inherited eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa
- have ever had any kidney problems
- have ever had any liver problems
- have ever had any blood problems, including sickle cell anemia or leukemia
- are allergic to sildenafil or any of the other ingredients of VIAGRA tablets
- have a deformed penis, Peyronie's disease, or ever had an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- have stomach ulcers or any types of bleeding problems
- are taking any other medicines

• VIAGRA and Other Medicines
Some medicines can change the way VIAGRA works. Tell your doctor about **any medicines** you are taking. Do not start or stop taking any medicines before checking with your doctor or pharmacist. This includes prescription and nonprescription medicines or remedies:
- Remember, VIAGRA should never be used with medicines that contain nitrates (see *VIAGRA Is Not for Everyone*).
- If you are taking alpha-blocker therapy for the treatment of high blood pressure or prostate problems, you should not take a dose of greater than 25 mg of VIAGRA at the same time (within 4 hours) as you take your dose of alpha-blocker.
- If you are taking a protease inhibitor, your dose may be adjusted (please see *Finding the Right Dose for You*).
- VIAGRA should not be used with any other medical treatments that cause erections. These treatments include pills, medicines that are injected or inserted into the penis, implants or vacuum pumps.

• Finding the Right Dose for You
VIAGRA comes in different doses (25 mg, 50 mg and 100 mg). If you do not get the results you expect, talk with your doctor. You and your doctor can determine the dose that works best for you.
- Do not take more VIAGRA than your doctor prescribes.
- If you think you need a larger dose of VIAGRA, check with your doctor.
- VIAGRA should not be taken more than once a day.

If you are older than age 65, or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg) of VIAGRA. If you are taking protease inhibitors, such as for the treatment of HIV, your doctor may recommend a 25 mg dose and may limit you to a maximum single dose of 25 mg of VIAGRA in a 48 hour period. If you are taking alpha-blocker therapy, you should not take a dose of greater than 25 mg of VIAGRA at the same time (within 4 hours) as your dose of alpha-blocker.

• How To Take VIAGRA
Take VIAGRA about one hour before you plan to have sex. Beginning in about 30 minutes and for up to 4 hours, VIAGRA can help you get an erection if you are sexually excited. If you take VIAGRA after a high-fat meal (such as a cheeseburger and french fries), the medicine may take a little longer to start working. VIAGRA can help you get an erection when you are sexually excited. You will not get an erection just by taking the pill.

• Possible Side Effects
Like all medicines, VIAGRA can cause some side effects. These effects are usually mild to moderate and usually don't last longer than a few hours. Some of these side effects are more likely to occur with higher doses. The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, flushing of the face, and upset stomach. Less common side effects that may occur are temporary changes in color vision (such as trouble telling the difference between blue and green objects or having a blue color tinge to them), eyes being more sensitive to light, or blurred vision.

In rare instances, men have reported an erection that lasts many hours. You should call a doctor immediately if you ever have an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. If not treated right away, permanent damage to your penis could occur (see *How Sex Affects the Body*).

Heart attack, stroke, irregular heart beats, and death have been reported rarely in men taking VIAGRA. Most, but not all, of these men had heart problems before taking this medicine. It is not possible to determine whether these events were directly related to VIAGRA.

VIAGRA may cause other side effects besides those listed on this sheet. If you want more information or develop any side effects or symptoms you are concerned about, call your doctor.

• Accidental Overdose
In case of accidental overdose, call your doctor right away.

• Storing VIAGRA
Keep VIAGRA out of the reach of children. Keep VIAGRA in its original container. Store at 25°C (77°F); excursions permitted to 15-30°C (59-86°F) [see USP Controlled Room Temperature].

• For More Information on VIAGRA
VIAGRA is a prescription medicine used to treat erectile dysfunction. Only your doctor can decide if it is right for you. This sheet is only a summary. If you have any questions or want more information about VIAGRA, talk with your doctor or pharmacist, visit www.viagra.com, or call 1-888-4VIAGRA.

Pfizer

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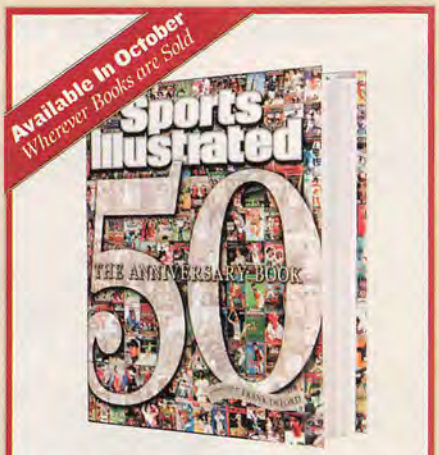
September 2002



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Hey, Fan, Put A Cork in It

by Steve Rushin

PLEASE READ carefully the terms and conditions on the back of this ticket, which does not entitle its holder to throw: bottles, batteries or up.

This ticket is not a license to hock loogies at Julio Lugo, the Devil Rays' shortstop, even if Tigers bullpen catcher Todd Maulding *has* been spit on while warming up pitchers at Safeco Field in Seattle. "There's times I've wanted to go into the stands," says Tigers reliever Jamie Walker, "but you just can't do that."

The holder of this ticket agrees that incessant heckling is *not* safeguarded in the Constitution, even if A's fan Craig Bueno insists that "it's an American tradition." It isn't. Many fans will be surprised to learn that U.S.A. does not stand for "U Suck, A------!"

"On my teams, from 1998 to 2003, the stuff we heard being yelled from the stands got more and more over the edge," says Tom Gamboa, the former Cubs and Royals coach who was beaten by a father-and-son tandem of White Sox fans at Comiskey Park in September 2002. "We would often ask each other on the bench, 'What makes people so *angry* that they have so much to vent at the ballpark?' "

Craig Bueno and his wife, Jennifer, specifically selected their A's season seats near the visitors' bullpen, in easy earshot of opposing relievers, precisely "so we can get on them a little bit." When one of the pitchers on their To-Boo list—Frank Francisco of the Rangers—reacted appallingly, by throwing a chair that broke the nose of Mrs. Bueno, the couple resorted to a *true* American tradition: the threat of a lawsuit.

Too many fans put the *pro* in profanity. "Coaches and players would say to me, 'Because a guy bought a ticket, he has the right to call me an a------?' " says Gamboa. "Cheering and booing and taunting are part of the action. But a line has to be drawn."

"Just because you buy a ticket doesn't give you the right to be an idiot," says Giants first baseman J.T. Snow. "If I go to a restaurant and the food's not right, I don't yell, 'The chef sucks!' "

The ticket holder hereby acknowledges this: "[Heckling] has a lot to do with fans looking at pro baseball players and thinking at one time they were good enough to be out there," says Brewers manager Ned Yost. "They think they can do just as good as you."

And so the heckler hereby concedes that the target of his invective is, in every sense of the phrase, the bigger man. *He* was promoted through AAA, AA and A ball. *You* throw AAA batteries, skip AA meetings and once passed out at the Big A in Anaheim.

Incidentally, outfielders are paid to shag flies, not Maxflis. And yet the final Expos home game was delayed 10 minutes after some troll threw a golf ball onto the field. If you're throwing balls in a stadium and you're not in uniform, you don't need a cutoff man, you need to be cut off by the beer man.

But when a partly filled plastic beer bottle was thrown at volatile Dodgers outfielder Milton Bradley last week, and he emptied the bottle and spiked it into the front row, *Bradley* was suspended, and apologized, and volunteered to attend anger-management classes. If Milton Bradley were a board game, he went from Aggravation to Trouble to Sorry! in a single night. But bottle-throwing fans don't endure such international public humiliation.

"As a player you're always expected to deal with issues in the appropriate way," says Pistons president Joe Dumars, a former Bad Boy. "At some point I think we're going to have to start demanding the same thing from some of these fans that cross the line."

"Just because you buy a ticket doesn't give you the right to be an idiot," says Giants first baseman J.T. Snow.

If you *do* heckle, remember these rules: Be clean, be clever, be seated. Example: When a bald soccer player missed a header at Dalymount Park in Dublin, a fan shouted, "Hey, Charlie, chalk your cue!"

When outfielder Rob Ducey let a ball get past him for a two-base error, a fan in Baltimore yelled, Ricky Ricardo–style, "Du-u-ucey, you got some *'splainin'* to do!"

Alas, these two examples—which are posted at the Heckle Depot (www.heckledepot.com), a website devoted to the art of needling athletes—are far outnumbered by postings like this: "We were a few beers in, so we kept heckling. We ended up getting escorted out by security."

The ticket holder hereby agrees: This has to stop. "I've been in baseball for 30 years," says Gamboa. "And I *hate* that I'll always be known as the guy who got attacked in Chicago."

Gamboa's mugging left him with permanent hearing damage in his right ear. He now does work for a group called S.A.V.E. (Survive a Violent Encounter), which aims to reduce violence in sports at all levels. "I come from the '60s," Gamboa says, "when a husband and wife could take their kids to a game without hearing profanity or racial epithets."

And so the ticket holder will be vigilant. "Fans have to point their fingers at people who are causing problems," says Cardinals reliever Steve Kline, "and get those people escorted out of there."

Hear that, America? It's time to take back our seats. □

SIMON BRUTY

"Lewis's plea agreement will

Scorec

Trivial Pursuit

Sensing that his brain was going soft, the author read the encyclopedia from A to Z . . . which is why he now knows more about sports than anyone should **By A.J. Jacobs**

THERE ARE 44 million words in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. I recently read every single one of them and lived to write a book about it. Here, a concise encyclopedia of the best sports trivia.

Basketball The score of the first basketball game—played in 1891 with a soccer ball and peach baskets—was 1–0, thanks to a midcourt basket by William R. Chase. Presumably, Chase then signed a multihundred-dollar cream-soda endorsement deal.

Bobsledding The name comes from the early belief that if the sledders bobbed their heads back and forth, it would help increase their speed. It didn't, but it did help them look incredibly dorky.

Caravaggio The baroque painter Caravaggio was the John McEnroe of his day. He killed a man during a brawl over the score of a tennis match.

Catchers, Multiple When baseball was first played, teams had a second catcher behind the regular catcher whose job was to field foul balls. What Mike Piazza would give for that.

Football Football players in 1905 killed more people on the field than current players do off the field. Eighteen players died from injuries during the college season. Teddy Roosevelt had a presidential commission investigate. From that came a shorter game and the forward pass.

Gloves, Boxing Bare-knuckle boxing, oddly enough, caused less brain damage than gloved boxing. The combatants didn't want to hurt their hands, so they rarely hit an opponent's head.

Gold Medals An Olympic gold medal is actually silver, plated with six grams of gold. So Marion Jones can take comfort in that.

Golf Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Scots did not invent golf. The true inventors were the Dutch. The Scots, though, did give us the first woman golfer—Mary, Queen of Scots. A literal golf widow, she got arrested for playing golf too soon after the death of her husband.

Heisman, John The legendary football coach—he of the trophy—was also a noted Shakespearean actor. His pep talks were often peppered with Bard-speak, and he called the football a "prolate spheroid." Sounds like Bill Parcells and his love of quoting Henrik Ibsen. Well, maybe I just imagined that last part.

Lacoste, René The 1920s French tennis star was nicknamed the Crocodile because of his love for fancy crocodile luggage. Yes, that thing on the Izod shirt is a crocodile, not an alligator.

Lacrosse The first Native American games had goals that were

A.J. Jacobs is the author of *The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World* (Simon & Schuster).

end him to prison for four months. —RUSH FROM JUDGMENT, PAGE 23

ard

miles apart, lasted three days and had a thousand players on each side, causing untold psychological trauma to the Native American who was picked last for his team.

Losers New York Giants manager Leo Durocher did not say, "Nice guys finish last." He really said, "The nice guys over there are in seventh place." These days, seventh place is still good enough to make the NBA playoffs.

Marathon The modern marathon is 26 miles and 385 yards long because the British Olympic Committee in 1908 wanted it to go from Windsor Castle to the Royal Box in London Stadium. Runners huffing through those final 385 yards can take comfort in the fact that the king's butt was comfortably in the shade that day.

Melee The predecessor to soccer. This 11th-century British game was first played with the head of an enemy Danish soldier.

Moat Speaking of rowdy soccer games, Latin American stadiums in the 1950s had moats to prevent fans from storming the field.

The Opposition The Opposition is the official team name of the guys who play the Harlem Globetrotters. The most pathetic job in the encyclopedia, not counting that of French soldier.

Paige, Satchel The great African-American pitcher would do almost anything to play a game. He once put on a fake red beard and played for the bearded House of David team. The House of David, by the way, was a baseball-loving apocalyptic cult that mandated facial hair. Probably one of the top five baseball-loving apocalyptic cults with mandatory facial hair.

Violence Bearbaiting was a popular sport in 17th-century England: A bear was tied to a stake, and trained dogs were set upon it. Other variations included a bull tied to a stake and a pony with an ape tied to his back. Sounds like Fox might have itself a new sports franchise!

Volleyball It was originally called mintonette. And if that's not bad enough, it was designed for businessmen who found the new game of basketball too vigorous.

And for those who find mintonette too vigorous, there's always reading the encyclopedia.

ILLUSTRATION: STEVE BRODNER; JOHN SLEEZER—THE KANSAS CITY STAR/AP (DENNEY); CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP (DENNEY STANDING)

Skirting Disaster

A pitcher's cheerleader outfit protected him from a serious gunshot wound

BOOT-YLICIOUS Denney (with mother) was dolled up for the Indians' bus ride to the airport.

Indians pitcher Kyle Denney needed more than a thick skin to survive the rookie hazing ritual that awaited him after a 5–2 win over the Royals on Sept. 29. Denney was forced by the team's veterans to don a USC cheerleader's outfit (blonde wig, skirt and white knee-high boots) on Cleveland's trip from Kansas City to Minneapolis. As the team bus turned onto I-435 en route to the airport, players heard a loud bang. Denney figured someone had set off a firecracker as a prank—until he felt a stinging sensation in his right calf. "I put a hand down to my boot, and there was a hole in it," said the 27-year-old righthander. "I put my finger in the hole, and there was blood."

That bang had been the sound of a bullet tearing through the bus's metal exterior. (As of Monday, Kansas City police had no suspects in the case; they believed the Indians' bus had been a random target.) Trainers Lonnie Soloff and Rick Jameyson squeezed the bullet, which was lodged about a half inch beneath Denney's skin, out of his leg right there on the bus; when it was clear his injuries weren't serious, the Indians continued on to the airport, where an ambulance was waiting to take Denney to a hospital. (Team veterans graciously allowed him to change into his street clothes before he got to the hospital.) "If the trainers thought Kyle was more seriously injured, we may have had to do something else," manager Eric Wedge said, "but I didn't think it was a good idea to stop if the guy was still shooting at us."

Jameyson said Denney's cheerleader boot—pitcher C.C. Sabathia chose the outfit because Denney's alma mater, second-ranked Oklahoma, is chasing USC in the college football polls—slowed the bullet's progress and saved the rookie from a deeper wound. "I'm sure glad the boots were on," said Denney, who rejoined his teammates last Thursday. He can consider his major league initiation complete. "I know the guy can pitch in the big leagues because he got shot and was about as calm as can be," said outfielder Ryan Ludwick, who was sitting across the aisle from Denney and was grazed by metal debris. "He acted like he'd been shot 100 times before."

Bouncing Back

A mogul hopes to revive the prospects for the megafirm of sports marketing

MICHAEL. DEION. Chico Escuela. To the catalog of sports comeback stories add financier Teddy Forstmann. The 64-year-old silver-haired buyout specialist who gained fame for a string of high-profile (and high-profit) deals in the 1980s and '90s—he bought and successfully ran Dr Pepper, Gulfstream and General Instruments, among others—last week announced he'll take over sports marketing megafirm IMG for $700 million. Forstmann, who recently ended up as the defendant in an investor fraud lawsuit after his $2.5 billion investment in two telecom firms, feels he can turn IMG into the sort of money machine he created when he took over Gulfstream in 1990. "I'm 29 for 30 when it comes to these big deals," says Forstmann. "That's a pretty good batting average."

In order to make this one work, he is going to have to, as he says, "make one and one equal four." He turned Gulfstream around thanks to the introduction of the flashy Gulfstream V jet that made tycoons swoon and athletes renegotiate the travel clause in their contracts. The sports marketing business, however, does not offer such simple, jet-propelled solutions. IMG, in particular, has not had a clear flight plan since the 2003 death of founder Mark McCormack, who pioneered the field of sports marketing. The firm, which books most of its billion-dollar revenue by partnering its superstar clients with corporate sponsors, has been divesting itself of some non-core assets (such as French soccer team RC Strasbourg, which it owned for six years) and shedding real estate and staff, laying off 400 people in the last year. While the firm's client list includes Tiger Woods, Peyton Manning and Venus Williams, it has lost out on such budding superstars as Yao Ming and LeBron James—who plies his trade in Cleveland, where IMG's headquarters is located.

MASTER STROKE Forstmann's new stable includes his green-jacket-winning pal Singh (right).

Forstmann's best hope lies in IMG's TWI unit, the world's largest independent producer of sports programming, handling Wimbledon and other lucrative properties. "The TV arm is their obvious growth play," says Randy Vataha of Game Plan LLC, an investment-banking firm specializing in sports-related deals.

"Sports have always been a big deal to me," says Forstmann, who is a golfing buddy of IMG client Vijay Singh and hosts a summer pro-am tennis tournament in the Hamptons. "When Bobby Thomson hit that home run, I didn't talk for a week." The obsessive Dodgers fan ran the numbers and considered buying the team last year. Now that he's in the sports game, Forstmann swears he can thrive as he has in other fields. "I coached Vijay Singh and made him the Number 1 golfer in the world," he says. Then, cautious about maintaining a close relationship in a business in which relationships are everything, he quickly adds, "That's a joke."

—Karl Taro Greenfeld

Go Figure

55 Paralympic Games medals won by blind swimmer Trischa Zorn, 40, since 1980, the most of any Paralympic athlete.

46 Age of Braves first baseman Julio Franco, who last week became the oldest major leaguer to steal a base in 78 years.

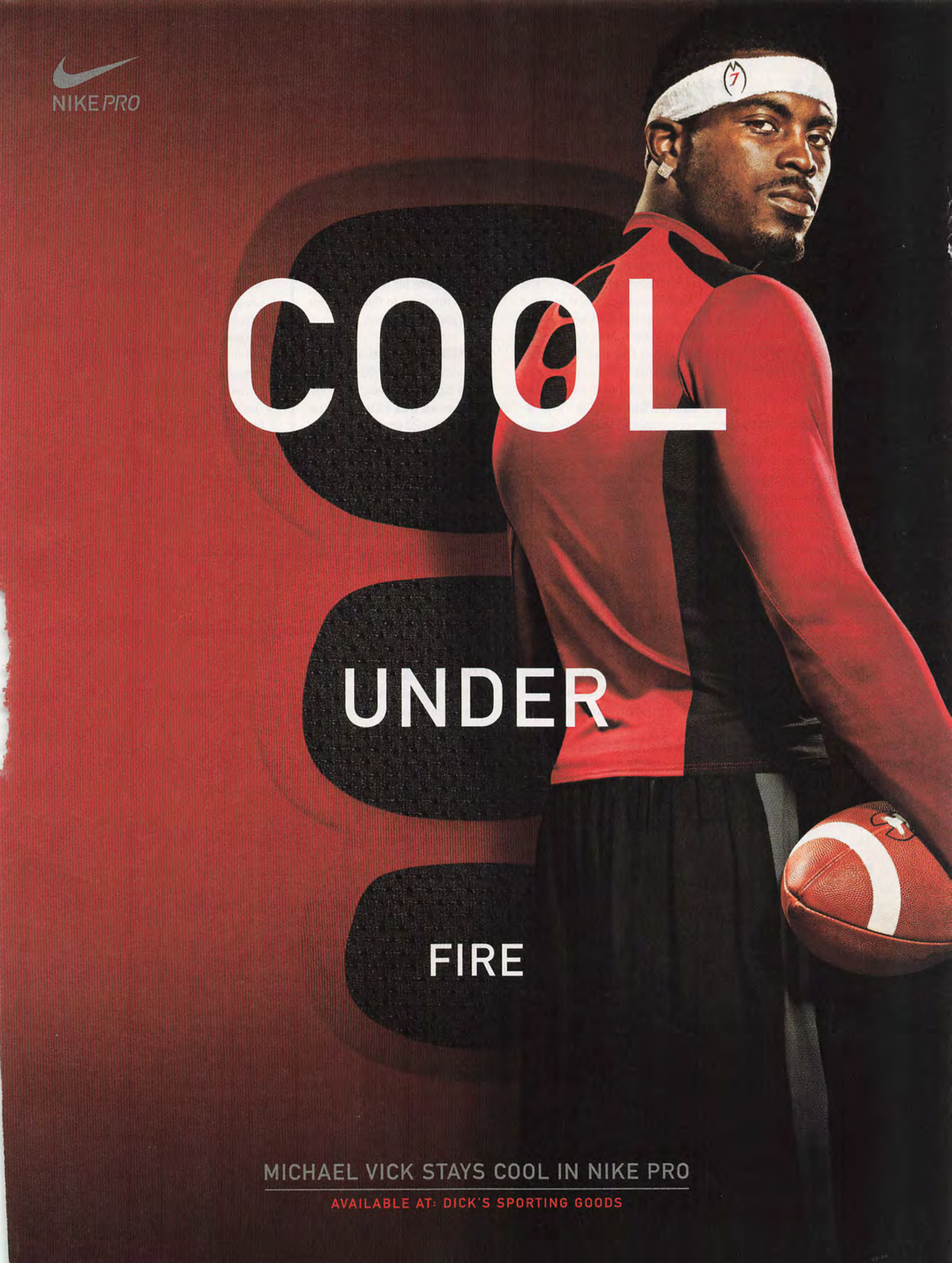
9 Percent of Native Americans who find the Washington Redskins' nickname offensive, according to a University of Pennsylvania poll.

1,439 Innings played by Marlins outfielder Juan Pierre, the only player to play every inning this year.

833 Nielsen rank, out of 834 cable shows, of the Sept. 27 edition of CNBC's *McEnroe*, beating the Food Network's *How to Boil Water*.

73,022,969 Major league baseball's total attendance this season, a record.

MIKE FIALA/WIREIMAGE.COM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For the Record

Rounded third For the final time, longtime Reds radio announcer Joe Nuxhall, 76, who retired from the booth after Cincinnati's season finale on Sunday. For generations of fans Nuxhall's trademark sign-off—"The old lefthander is rounding third and heading for home"—and folksy manner were synonymous with Reds baseball. The native of Hamilton, Ohio, began his 60-year association with the team in 1944, when, at 15, he became the youngest player in the modern era to appear in a major league game. (He allowed five runs in two thirds of an inning.) Nuxhall was shipped to the minors after that but returned in '52 to Cincinnati, where he won 135 games and played in two All-Star Games before retiring in 1966. The next season he was in the Reds' radio booth, mispronouncing names and occasionally confusing left- and rightfield—to the delight of his listeners. Says longtime broadcast partner Marty Brennaman, "He is the most beloved man in Cincinnati sports history."

Died Former Steelers offensive lineman Justin Strzelczyk, 36, in a fiery crash after leading New York state troopers on a high-speed chase. Last Thursday morning Strzelczyk, who lived in McCandless, Pa., fled after being involved in two minor accidents near Syracuse. He refused to pull over—police say he tossed a beer bottle at them—and after 40 miles his truck rammed an oil tanker at nearly 90 mph. (The other driver suffered only minor injuries.) In 1999 Strzelczyk was arrested after slamming a loaded pistol onto a bar during a political argument. "I had seen trouble with his mood disorders coming," said his mother, Mary Joyce Strzelczyk.

Died At age 44, Blue Jays television commentator John Cerutti, the team's first-round draft pick in 1981. Cerutti, who was 49–43 in seven major league seasons, was found dead—apparently of natural causes—in his hotel room at SkyDome last Sunday, hours before the team's season ender against the Yankees. Cerutti's death came four months after Tom Cheek, who called every Jays game on the radio from the team's inception until earlier this summer, underwent surgery for a brain tumor. Cheek returned to the booth for home games in August.

Taken For a ride by a 20-foot juvenile gray whale, 60-year-old surfer Spyros Vamvas. On Sept. 27 Vamvas was sitting on his board about 20 yards from shore near San Clemente, Calif., when the whale swam underneath Vamvas and began thrashing, lifting him and his board out of the ocean. The whale, apparently spooked by the encounter, then sped out to sea, leaving Vamvas unharmed. Marine Safety Chief Bill Humphreys, who witnessed the incident, says, "I've worked here for 27 years, and I've never seen anything like it."

Adopted By the Red Sox as a the team's good luck charm, 28-inch actor Nelson de la Rosa. Twenty-four hours after he suffered a 6–4 loss to the Yankees two weeks ago, Pedro Martinez showed up at the clubhouse carrying De la Rosa on his shoulder. Martinez met the 36-year-old Dominican actor (*The Island of Dr. Moreau*) through friends. In a surreal scene in the locker room, De la Rosa posed for pictures on the laps of players and coaches. (According to G.M. Theo Epstein, manager Terry Francona checked to see if De la Rosa was battery-powered.) "He's our lucky charm now," said Martinez. "The guys are falling in love with him."

Upbraided By Nigerian soccer officials, players who braid their hair. Several top national team players, including Nwankwo Kanu *(above)*, do so, prompting a government official to say, "In the developing world the braiding of hair and earrings have a sense of homosexuality." Refs in the country's youth championships were told to eject players who hit the pitch in braids.

Rush from Judgment

The Ravens' top rusher cops a plea to avoid a trial in his drug case

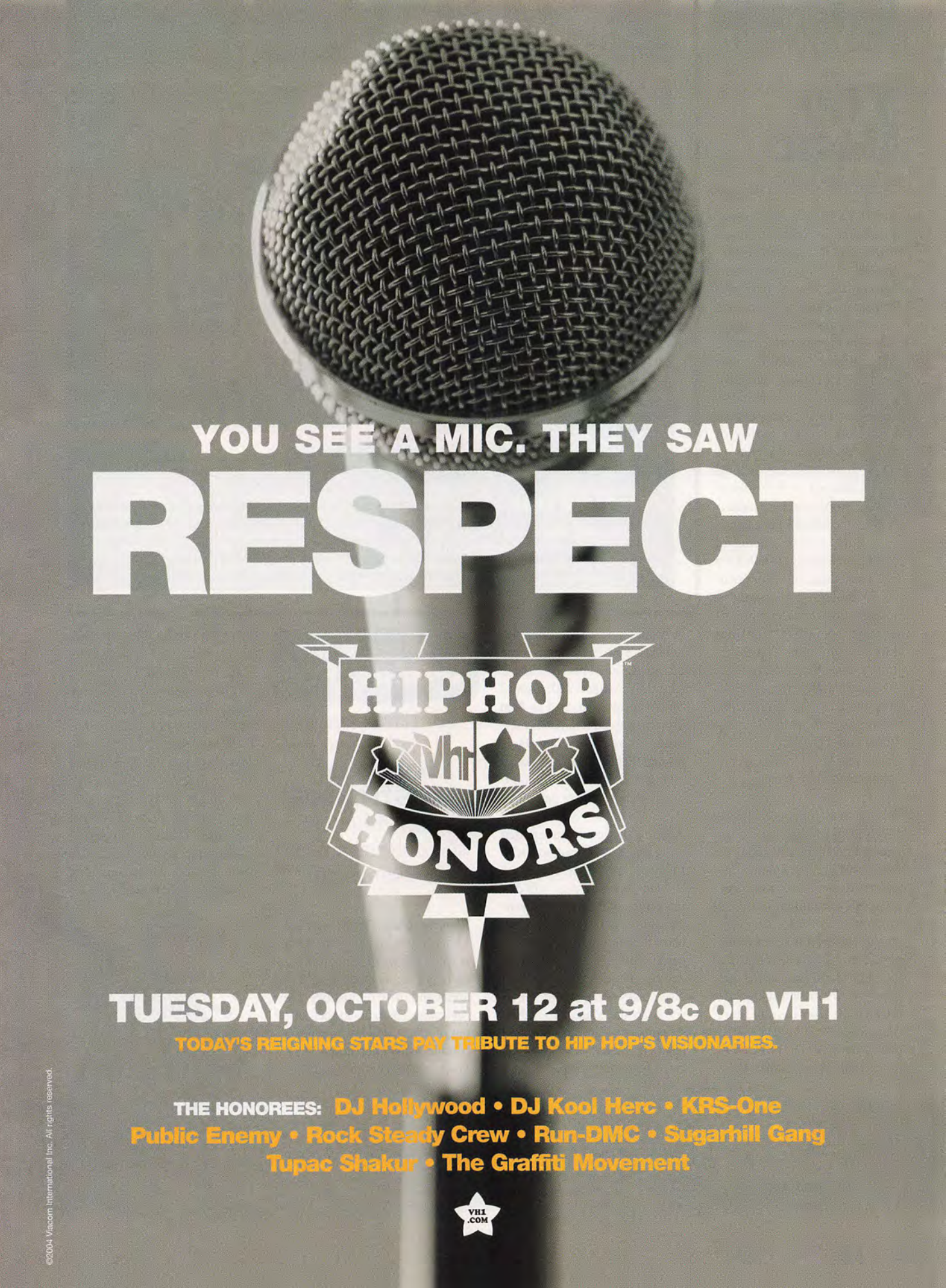
SAY THIS ABOUT Ravens running back Jamal Lewis: The man can compartmentalize. Facing a Nov. 1 federal drug trial, the reigning NFL offensive player of the year hasn't missed a beat in 2004, scoring three touchdowns in his first three games. Last week his attorneys reached a plea agreement with prosecutors in Atlanta that will send him to prison for four months.

According to an indictment filed last February, in June 2000 Lewis, 25, introduced longtime friend Angelo Jackson to a woman he thought was a drug dealer but was actually an FBI informant. Lewis and Jackson allegedly intended to purchase and distribute five kilograms of cocaine. If convicted on the drug-conspiracy charge he faced, Lewis could have been sentenced to three years in prison. By pleading to a lesser charge (using a cellphone to set up a drug transaction), Lewis, who also agreed to cooperate in the case against Jackson, significantly reduced his potential jail time. "This seems to be a plea of convenience, not a plea of truth," says Steve Sadow, Jackson's attorney. (Lewis's attorneys could not be reached.)

JAILBIRD Lewis (on field and leaving court last February) faces a four-month sentence.

Lewis also almost certainly faces a suspension. His plea is a violation of the NFL's substance-abuse policy, which he breached in 2001. (He served a four-game ban.) Lewis seemed unfazed as he prepared to face the Chiefs on Monday night. "This is what I like to do, this is my career," he said. "That pretty much says it all."

BEN RADFORD/GETTY IMAGES (KANU); JOHN BAZEMORE/AP (LEWIS IN COURT); SCOTT THORNTON/WIREIMAGE.COM (LEWIS PLAYING); AP (NUXHALL)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The Beat

By Lisa Altobelli

SANDY LANE, a pricey resort in Barbados, will be closed Oct. 4–9 for what the hotel manager called "a private party." Many signs indicate that the party was for **Tiger Woods**'s hotly anticipated wedding to Swedish model **Elin Nordegren**, whom he has been dating since 2001. Sandy Lane is co-owned by Irish multimillionaire **J.P. McManus**, a golf buddy of Woods's, and as SI went to press Monday evening, friends and family of Woods and his fiancée—including Tiger's father, **Earl**, whose declining health has severely curtailed his travel schedule, and Elin's twin sister, **Josefine**—had descended on Barbados. (On Monday, Earl refused to confirm that the wedding was imminent.) The only thing tougher than nailing down Tiger's wedding plans is finding the right present for him. "What do you give for a gift for a guy who's got everything?" asked Davis Love III. "I know I would definitely not buy a toaster."

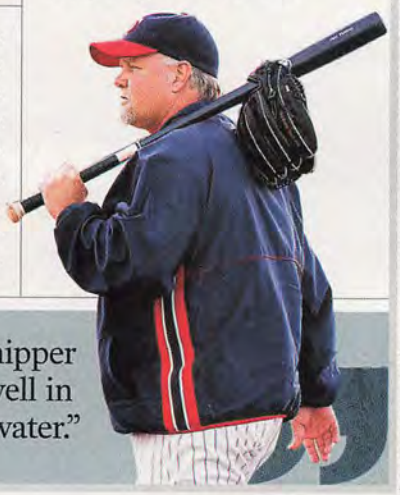
■ With auction items such as a $7,000 **Dave Matthews**–autographed guitar and a $1,700 Bada Bing bowling shirt signed by *Sopranos* cast members, former Dolphin **Nick Buoniconti** raised $2.6 million on Sept. 28 at his annual Great Sports Legends Dinner at New York's Waldorf-Astoria for The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis. Buoniconti started the foundation after his son Marc was paralyzed while playing football at the Citadel in 1985. "He's never looked back and asked, 'Why me?' " says Buoniconti. "He just looks forward to the day when he can get out of his wheelchair. And that's what it's all about." The event was emceed by **Tom Brokaw**; the sports legends honored this year included **Barry Sanders, Robert Parish, Mia Hamm** and **Cam Neely**, who has a foundation to help cancer patients.

■ If only they could have gotten rid of **Joe Barry Carroll** so easily. Inspired by *The Apprentice*, the Golden State Warriors will dismiss one college student competing for a full-time job with the team during Wednesday home games. The 10 prospective interns will be split into two teams and given tasks such as selling corporate sponsorships. Fans will be shown footage and decide whom team president **Robert Rowell** will let go. Says Warriors p.r. director **Raymond Ridder**, "We'll even have a boardroom, and after an intern is voted off, we're going to have them get in a taxi outside of the arena and drive off just like *The Apprentice*. Fans should get a kick out of it." . . . Will bowling be as conducive to diplomacy as Ping-Pong was 33 years ago? Early returns aren't favorable. **Bill O'Reilly** has refused **Al Franken**'s challenge to go head-to-head as part of the Great American Meetup Bowl-Off on Oct. 7. The nationwide kegling event pits Team Blue (Kerry supporters) against Team Red (Bush backers). "If Kerry and Bush supporters can put aside their differences for a day to compete, well, then, so can Bill O'Reilly and I," said Franken. A spokesman for Fox said, "Bill O'Reilly is not going to respond to anything Al Franken says."

PICTURE THIS In China, where there's no minimum drinking age, you're never too young to have a six-pack. That was made clear by these students at a government-sponsored athletics academy, where kids between ages six and 19 train in nine disciplines and dream of glory when China hosts the Olympics in 2008. For motivation they need only check the medals tally from the last Games: Five alums won gold in Athens.

THIS WEEK'S SIGN OF THE **APOCALYPSE**

Foul language by their fans got a **team of prostitutes** ejected from a soccer tournament in Guatemala.



ALESSANDRO DIGAETANO/POLARIS (PICTURE THIS); CHARLES KRUPA/AP (GARDENHIRE); ANDREW REDINGTON/GETTY IMAGES (WOODS AND NORDEGREN)

They Said It

RON GARDENHIRE

Twins manager, after learning that Atlanta's Chipper Jones named his son Shea because he hits so well in New York: "I should have named my kid Tidewater."

Chevy Colorado

Cadillac Escalade

Chevy Avalanche

Buick Rainier

GMC Envoy XUV

Saturn VUE

Chevy Tahoe

HUMMER H2

GMC Sierra

it's Truck-tober

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The Show

By Bill Scheft

BAD DREAM last night. I was at the World Series of Poker, and I folded with A's and Cubs.

End of an Error: Baseball returns to nation's Capital There may be trouble naming the new Washington team. The rights to *Senators* are owned by the Texas Rangers. And there's not enough room on a jersey for *Ineffectual Bureaucrats*.

Wait a minute. How about a name that captures the essence of the new franchise? The Angelos Dodgers?

Meanwhile, no disrespect to the Red Sox and the Astros, but weren't the wild-card slots already clinched by Jose Guillen and Milton Bradley?

The Angels suspended Guillen for the remainder of their season after he threw a tantrum late in a game. Not only that, the Rally Monkey is after Guillen for stealing his act.

Bradley was suspended after threatening a fan who threw a beer bottle in his direction. Turns out it was all a misunderstanding. The fan he was going after with that beer bottle was dressed as one of those blue recycling bins.

President Bush signs law establishing tougher penalties for unethical sports agents Getting rid of sleazy agents? I don't think the economy can afford to lose another one million jobs.

The bill was promoted by Nebraska coach turned congressman Tom Osborne. It passed so overwhelmingly in the House that, at 42–0, Osborne put in his scout team.

Patriots tie NFL record with 18th straight win Now that that's out of the way, throw a uniform on Bill Belichick and stick him in the Red Sox dugout for the next three weeks.

During the Packers' 14–7 loss to the Giants last Sunday, Brett Favre suffered a concussion then came back in for one play and threw a touchdown pass. Favre was hit so hard that for the next two series Troy Aikman didn't know what broadcast booth *he* was in.

3Com Park has been renamed Monster Park. I was shocked. Who knew the 49ers still had enough cap space for Charlize Theron?

In a *60 Minutes* interview Bill Parcells claimed that over the years a few players have taken a swing at him. He didn't mention names, but I've got it narrowed down to 283.

The Dolphins lost running back Lamar Gordon for the season. Does anyone have Jim Kiick's phone number at the assisted living facility?

Let's continue to play the *Feud*! This is getting ugly. Now Kobe is claiming Shaq paid women to keep quiet about his free throw shooting.

Kobe claimed Shaq once paid up to $1 million in hush money. But to get that kind of dough, the woman had to keep quiet and also drain a half-court jumper.

Funny Cide wins Jockey Club Gold Cup Of course, with a gelding, any cup is for display purposes only.

Chuck Wepner moving forward with suit against Sylvester Stallone Wepner feels he deserves a share of profits from the *Rocky* films. That's a switch. Wepner trying to bleed someone else.

Pigeon released at Olympics found in Romania O.K., wake up the boys in the lab and get that bird's blood tested for Goose Growth Hormone.

My time is up. You've been great. Enjoy Cutting Crew.

Bill Scheft has been volunteering at an NFL Suicide Pool Hotline.

Q+A

Chris Chelios

The 11-time NHL All-Star defenseman plans to play with the Chicago Wolves of the AHL until the NHL lockout ends

SI: Is it strange not to be in training camp right now?

Chelios: Well, I just got out of the World Cup, so it doesn't seem like I've been out that long. But in another couple of weeks it will hit. It's less of a weird feeling and more of an awful feeling, knowing there's no light at the end of the tunnel right now.

SI: How long do you think the lockout will last?

Chelios: It will either end in January or last the whole year.

SI: Gordie Howe played into his 50s. At 42, how much longer do you see yourself playing?

Chelios: If I wanted to play until I was 45 or 47, I don't think it would be a problem physically. But my family would be a big problem. I can't live away from them. If Detroit wants me to play with the team for years, that would be great. But that's probably the only way for me to continue.

SI: Do NHL players pay attention to declining TV ratings?

Chelios: Sure we do. It bothers us. Especially when you hear that volleyball is getting higher ratings than hockey. Some cities are never going to be into hockey. I think we've let too many teams into the league and that's the biggest problem now.

SI: You're a first generation Greek-American. Are you serious about forming a bobsled team to compete for Greece in the 2006 Olympics?

Chelios: I'm applying now for my Greek passport. It just so happens one of my best friends is big-wave surfer Laird Hamilton. He's Greek and built like an ox. Perfect for pushing a bobsled. We're going to go for a couple of runs this winter and see what happens. Whether it's hockey for the United States or bobsledding for the Greeks, I'm going to get to Italy somehow.

—Richard Deitsch

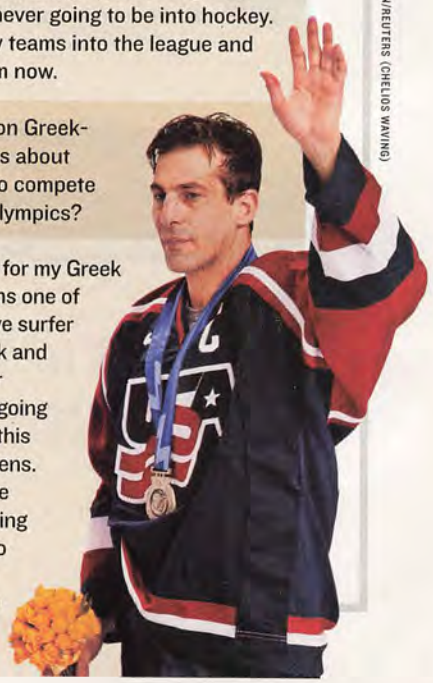
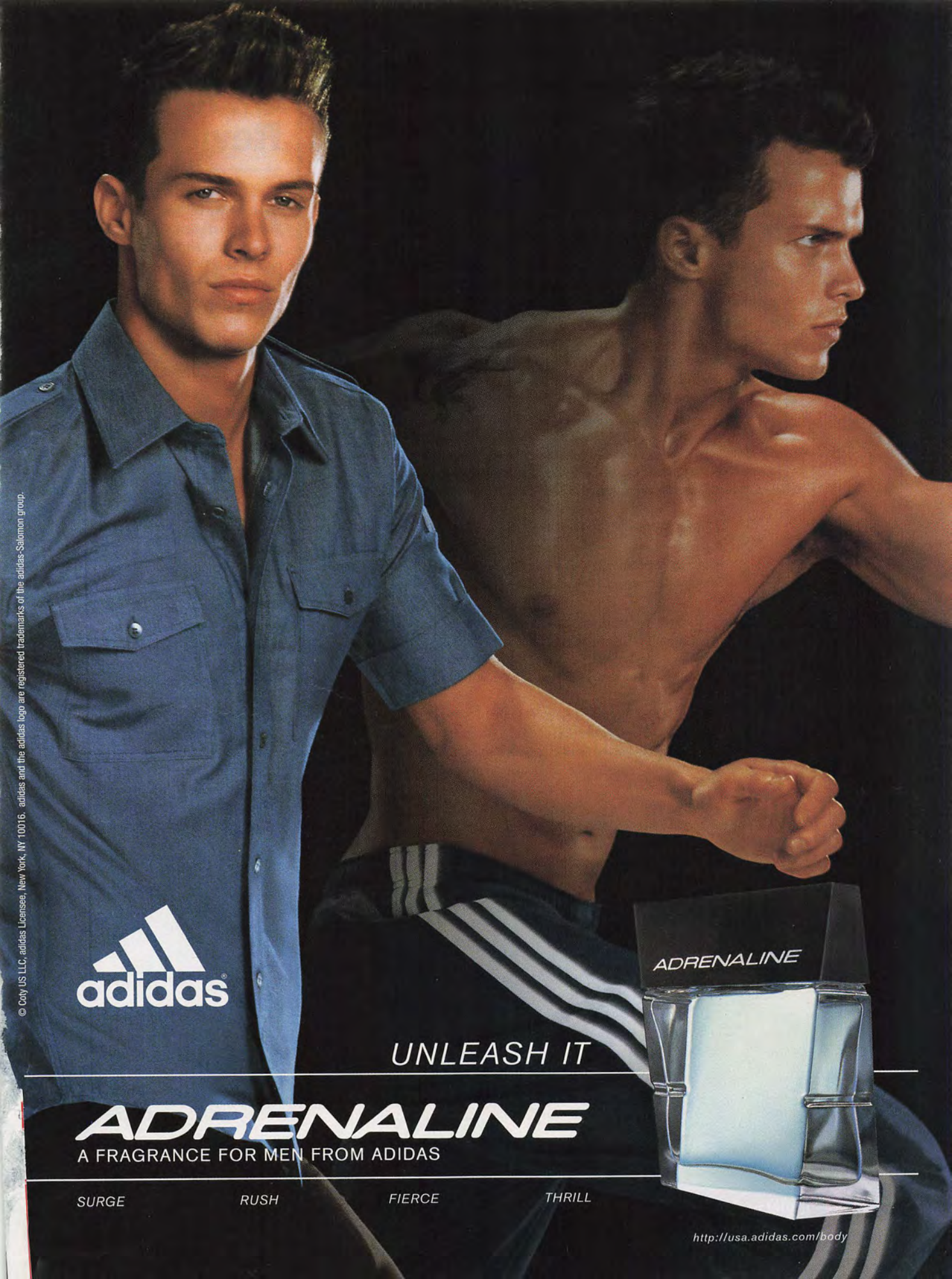


ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF WONG; JON KOPALOFF/WIREIMAGE.COM (CHELIOS); GARY HERSHORN/REUTERS (CHELIOS WAVING)



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The Week Ahead

What to watch and watch for **By Julia Morrill**

FRIDAY 8

College hockey, North Dakota at Maine CSTV 8 p.m. | The No. 3 Fighting Sioux are led by forward Brady Murray, who is coming off a 46-point season. Trying to stop him will be the No. 4 Black Bears' goalie, Jimmy Howard, who had an NCAA-record 1.19 GAA last year.

SATURDAY 9

Oklahoma vs. Texas ABC Noon | The Sooners did the shooting in last year's Red River Shootout, winning 65–13. **World Cyber Games** The penultimate day of the video Olympics (games include soccer and car racing) in San Francisco. On the line: $400,000.

SUNDAY 10

Lions at Falcons FOX 1 p.m. | QB Michael Vick has been ho-hum in the new West Coast offense, but the Falcons are still 4–0. ***When We Were Kings* ESPN Classic 8 p.m.** | The documentary about the '74 rumble between Ali and Foreman was No. 10 on SI's sports movie list.

MONDAY 11

***Tennis Insiders: The Russian Revolution* Tennis Channel 9 p.m.** | Journalists and coaches discuss the take-ova of women's tennis by Wimbledon champ Maria Sharapova and U.S. Open winner Svetlana Kuznetsova. (And Anastasia Myskina, who won the French.)

TUESDAY 12

1992 NFC Championship: Cowboys at 49ers ESPN Classic 9 p.m. With the Bills awaiting the winner in Super Bowl XXVII, this one, for all intents and purposes, was for all the marbles. Troy Aikman (322 yards and two TDs) directed three long second-half drives.

WEDNESDAY 13

World Cup Qualifying, U.S. vs. Panama ESPN2 7:30 p.m. | Last month in Panama City the U.S. needed a late goal from Cobi Jones to salvage a tie against the No. 106 team in the world. A loss in D.C. would jeopardize the Yanks' chances of making it to Germany in 2006.

THURSDAY 14

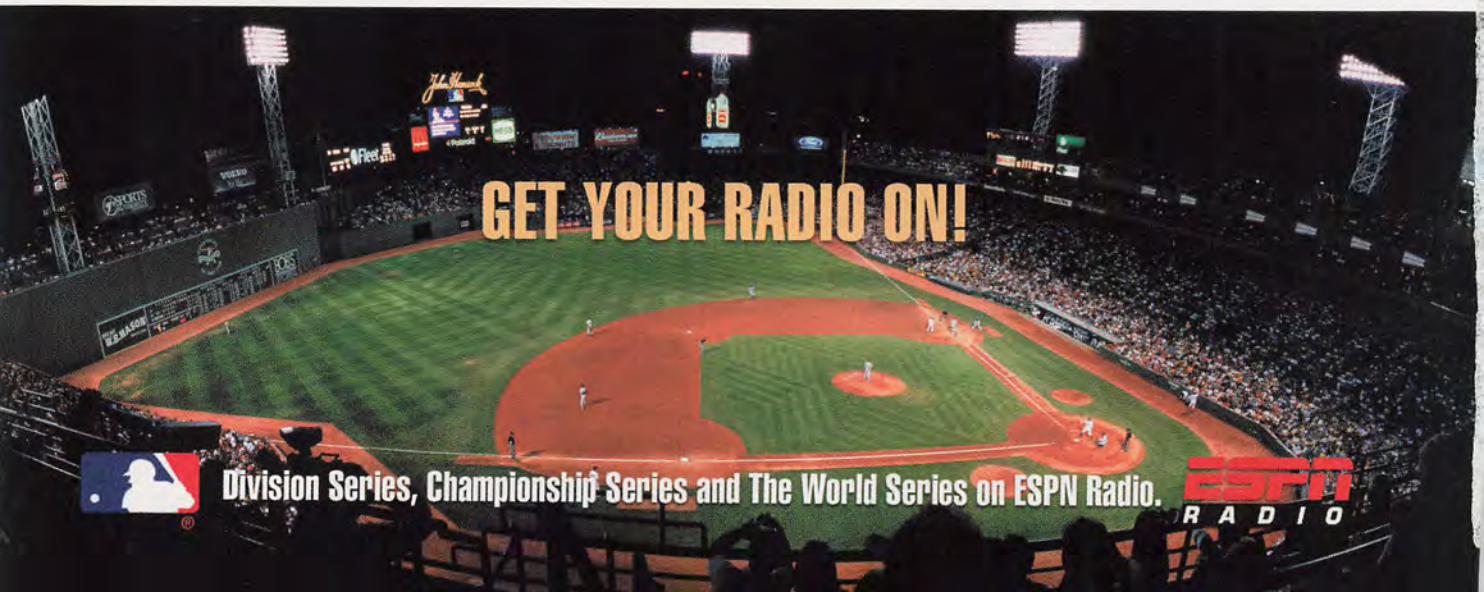
Rockets vs. Kings ESPN2 7:30 p.m. | Yao Ming brings his Houston teammates to China for the first NBA games behind the Great Wall. Though Shanghai Stadium holds just 11,500, two Chinese TV networks will broadcast the preseason matchup to 314 million households.

Under Review

The bashing of *Monday Night Football*'s new halftime feature, You've Been Sacked—in which NFL players play a prank on an unsuspecting teammate, a la MTV's *Punk'd*—is hardly surprising. Nothing inspires more reactionary howling than *MNF*'s seasonal makeovers, from the 2000 addition of arcana-loving comedian Dennis Miller (he was subtracted after two seasons) to last year's hiring of glam sideline reporter Lisa Guerrero, who lasted just one season. But Sacked, while not a masterstroke, doesn't deserve the gong just yet.

The first of the eight planned segments—in which Rams wideout Torry Holt was duped into thinking he'd been named the league's best-dressed player and sat for a fake magazine photo shoot that ended with him dressed as a ballerina—was at times amusing. (That's more than can be said of last year's halftime segments, a competition featuring players jamming with B-list musical acts.) Credit ABC for understanding what most of the kids are watching these days—comedic reality-driven programs—and for creatively skewering the vanity of a few pro athletes. While future segments should go easy on the hypermacho undertones *(Torry's in a tutu! What a girlie-man!)*, Sacked could be far, far worse. Many *Monday Night* segments have been. —*Josh Elliott*

SCOTT GANDINI/UND (MURRAY); AP (ALI); JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (AIKMAN); DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP (YAO); SIMON BRUTY (JONES); FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (SHARAPOVA); JEFFREY HAUBERTHAUER/ICON SMI (OKLAHOMA)



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Stewart Mandel's Power Rankings

1 USC (4–0)
In Saturday's showdown with Cal, which beat the Trojans 34–31 last year, the revenge factor will have USC foaming at the mouth.
Next game: Saturday vs. Cal

2 Oklahoma (4–0)
QB **Jason White** isn't putting up the numbers that got him the Heisman last year. What he is doing is avoiding mistakes and running the offense like, well, a sixth-year senior.
Next game: Saturday vs. Texas (in Dallas)

3 Auburn (5–0)
Tennessee freshman QB **Erik Ainge** entered last Saturday's game as the nation's fourth-rated passer. By the time the Tigers' defense was through, Ainge had four picks and the nation's 23rd-highest passer rating.
Next game: Saturday vs. Louisiana Tech

4 Georgia (4–0)
Half of **David Greene**'s passes against LSU on Saturday went for touchdowns. But the real key to the Dawgs' improved offense is the emergence of freshman running backs **Danny Ware** and **Thomas Brown.**
Next game: Saturday vs. Tennessee

5 Texas (4–0)
Senior RB **Cedric Benson** *(right)* had yet another big day on Saturday, with 188 yards on the ground against Baylor—the fourth time in as many games he's eclipsed 180 yards. But with the Red River Shootout looming, more noteworthy was the steady play of sophomore quarterback **Vince Young**, who was 15 of 20 for 189 yards and two TDs.
Next game: Saturday vs. Oklahoma (in Dallas)

WESLEY HITT/WIREIMAGE.COM

The Poll Position

Which team is most likely to pull a Division Series upset?

- ○ Astros
- ○ Dodgers
- ○ Twins
- ○ Red Sox

Vote at **SI.com/baseball.**
Watch for the results here next week.

Results of last issue's poll: We asked if Roger Federer, SI's men's tennis player of the year, should be a candidate for SI's Sportsman of the Year. With 21,000 votes in, 51% thought he should, while 49% answered no.

▶ Stewart Mandel's complete College Football Power Rankings appear every Monday—and his mailbag appears every Tuesday—on SI.com/football/ncaa.

SI.com Web Insiders

MON.	SI senior writer **Phil Taylor** weighs in on a timely issue in his Hot Button column, while **Peter King** delivers his Monday Morning Quarterback.
TUE.	Baseball writer **Tom Verducci** dishes up the hot stove dirt in his Insider, and NASCAR driver **Ricky Rudd** goes Around the Track.
WED.	SI senior contributing writer **Frank Deford** offers his Viewpoint, and **Dr. Z** uses his power of prognostication to pick the weekend's NFL winners.
THU.	Senior writer **Michael Silver** speaks his mind in his Open Mike column, while **Josh Elliott** riffs on the headlines in his Daily Blog.
FRI.	**Tim Layden** provides his Viewpoint, while college football editor **B.J. Schecter** previews the weekend's top tilt in his Marquee Matchup.

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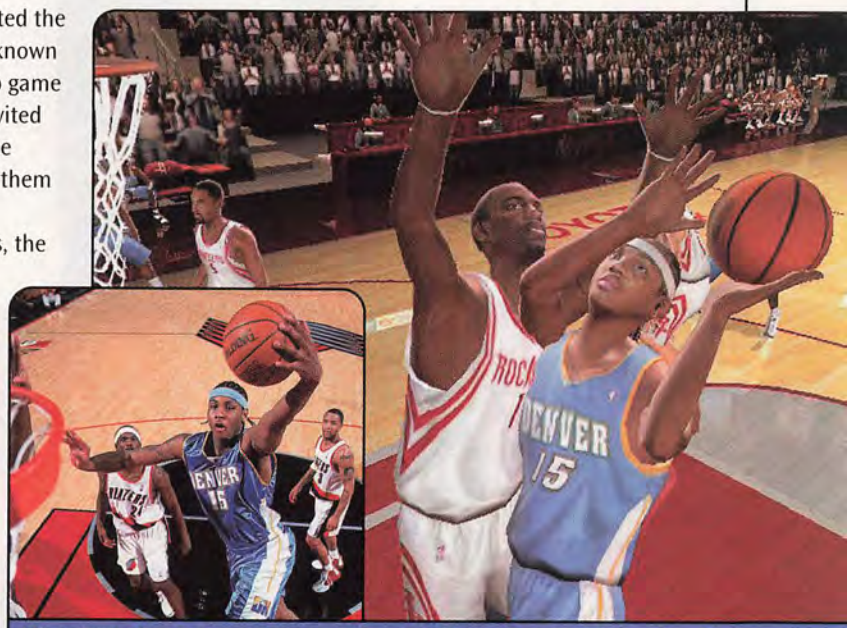
Keepin' It Real

VIDEO GAME MAKERS FEED A FRENZY AS THEY PUSH TO RE-CREATE LIVE ACTION

Early in his NBA career, Spurs forward Malik Rose visited the EA Sports offices in Redwood City, Calif., to let it be known that not only was he faster and stronger than EA's video game version, but he rebounded better too. To prove it he invited *NBA Live*'s producers to sit courtside at that night's game against Golden State. "Look what I'm doing," he said to them as he lit up the Warriors. "I'm showing you right now."

Such is life in Video Game Nation. Led by EA Sports, the giant that controls more than half the market, sports video games are a $1 billion-plus industry. But proof of their place in the sports stratosphere goes beyond even that huge number. Forget contracts and championships; ballers are motivated by perceived snubs in their video game ratings too. (Rose isn't alone: The Kings' Mike Bibby lobbied EA Sports because his pixel persona couldn't dunk.) PlayStations act as playbooks, with coaches crediting the games for helping their athletes get a better feel for live action. And the NBA has turned to EA Sports to incorporate *NBA Live* high-def animations into its broadcasts. The *games* are becoming as big as the games.



Mirroring Melo: EA Sports producers elevate NBA Live *to new heights of realism.*

Realism fuels their popularity. We've come a long way from the days of A to shoot and B to jump. Activision's *Tony Hawk's Underground* lets you download your pic to make yourself into a skater. Is your team not getting the love it deserves? EA Sports' *Madden 2005*'s Create-a-Fan helps you hype the crowd. And with enhanced Freestyle control on *NBA Live 2005*, released last week, you can get by your virtual defender with moves you wish you had on the playground.

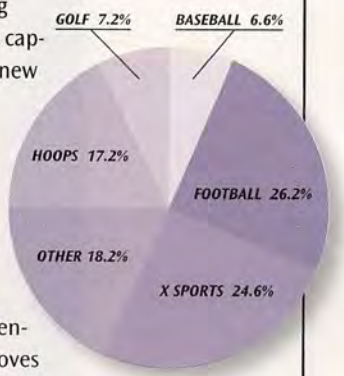
For the guys behind it all, it's not just all fun and, um, games. Each edition of *NBA Live* takes 60 producers, programmers, artists and sound people working year round. They use the latest technologies—for instance, motion capture (*In Motion*, left) helps them create basic moves—and develop new ones. Bleary-eyed animators watch video over and over, then painstakingly tweak plays by hand until a Carmelo Anthony throwdown is exactly what you'd see on TV. Artists stare at athletes' photos for days to make sure video versions mirror the real deal.

Before a new game even hits shelves, its makers are already looking for ways to top it with the next incarnation. A major step forward with *NBA Live 2005* is 10-man motion capture. For the first time in sports gaming history, EA brought in two entire teams and let the guys run full court. The result? Truer moves from posting up to boxing out. With PS 3 and Xbox 2 hitting the market in late 2005 or early '06, advanced console technology opens the door to even more not-so-virtual reality.

"Halfway through this year I looked back at *NBA Live 2004* and said, 'I can't believe we thought that was amazing,' " says *NBA Live 2005* associate producer Todd Batty. "Until our game looks exactly like an NBA game, we can continue to get better." All that's holding the games back? The athletes in video games can only be as good as their real-life counterparts.—*Maria Burns*

IN Motion

In motion capture, a major reason for advances in game realism, athletes run, jump, pass and shoot in spandex suits with Ping-Pong ball-like sensors attached (below). Cameras hit the sensors, placed to represent bones and joints, and the info creates a basic computer skeleton of an athlete.



Football, extreme sports and basketball were the best sellers among sports games last year.

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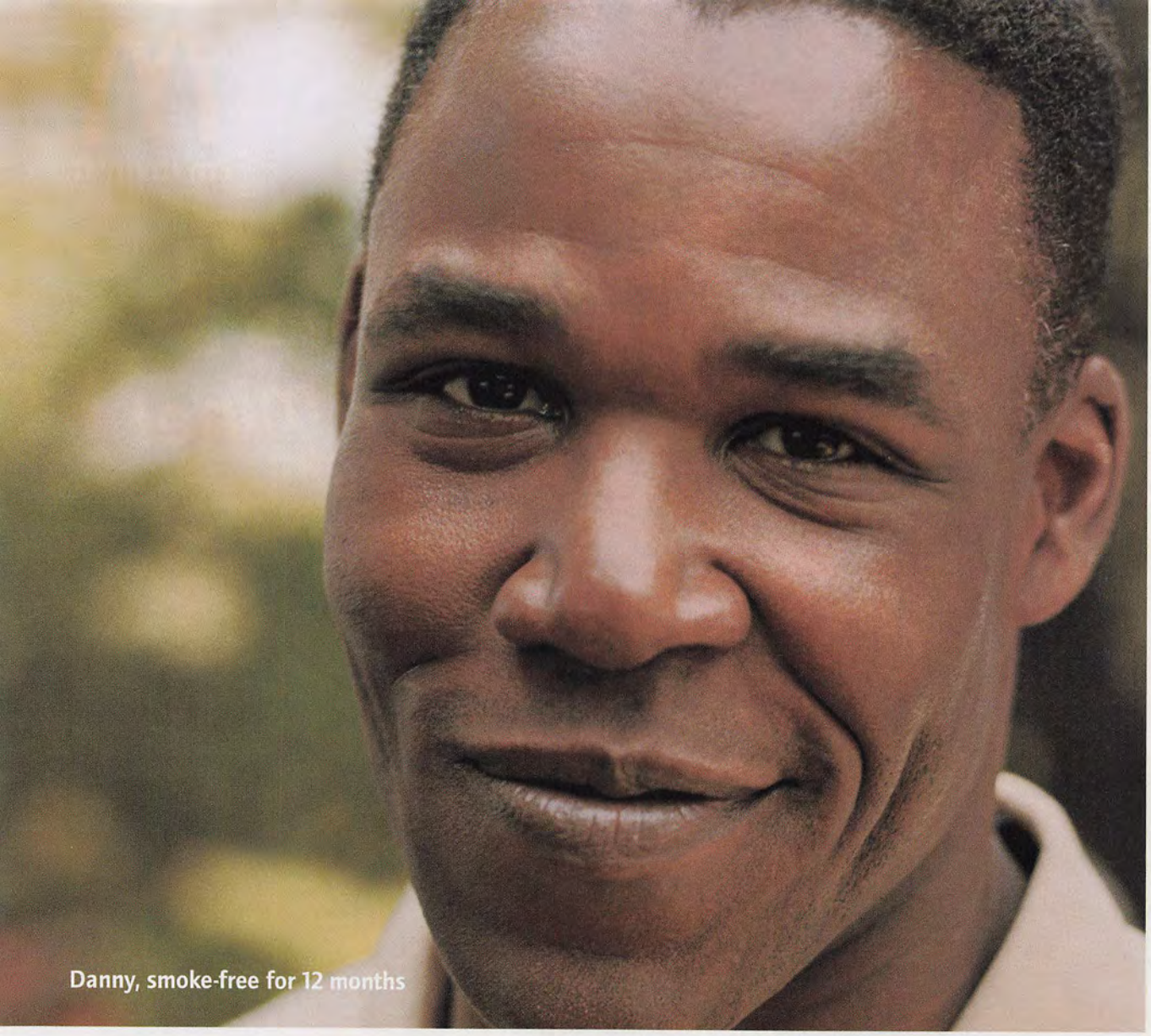

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Faces in the Crowd

Kris Rake

FLOWER MOUND, TEXAS > Soccer

Rake, a sophomore goalkeeper at William and Mary, had 10 saves (matching his career high) and shut out the nation's highest-scoring team as the Tribe upset No. 1–ranked Maryland 1–0 in double overtime. He was named to the College Soccer News National Team of the Week.

Jennifer Kempf

SAINT JOSEPH, MO. > Softball

Jennifer, a senior pitcher at Bishop LeBlond High, has started and finished all 20 games for the 18–2 Golden Eagles. In 134⅔ innings the righthander allowed two earned runs and struck out 268 batters. She has an 0.13 ERA and has thrown four no-hitters, two of them perfect games.

Stacey Gordon

OSHAWA, ONT. > Volleyball

Gordon, a senior outside hitter at Ohio State, tops the NCAA's Division I in kills per game and has double-figure kills in 90 straight matches. She was named the Division I national player of the week after leading the undefeated Buckeyes to wins over Xavier and Georgia Tech.

Kevin Fitzpatrick

HARRISON, N.Y. > Golf

Kevin, 16, a junior at Iona Prep, became the youngest winner ever of the men's club championship at the Westchester Country Club in Rye, N.Y. He also won the junior club championship and became the first player to win both tournaments in the same year.

Hilary White

GAINESVILLE, FLA. > Cross-country

White, a junior at the Savannah College of Art and Design, won the women's 5K individual title and led the Bees to their first win of the season at the Citadel Invitational. She set the 5K school record with a time of 18:01: It was the fourth time in as many weeks that she has lowered the mark.

Isaac Fitzgerald

SAVANNAH > Football

Isaac, a senior wingback and returner at Johnson High, ran back a kickoff 85 yards for a touchdown in the first half of a game against Savannah High and began the second half with another touchdown, a kickoff return for 80 yards. He had 279 yards in returns in a 32–31 win.

SI.com *To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to* **SI.com/faces.**

FROM TOP: BOB KERDACK; COURTESY OF KEMPF FAMILY; WILL SHILLING; JIM LUZZI; BEN DASHWOOD; STEPHEN MORTON

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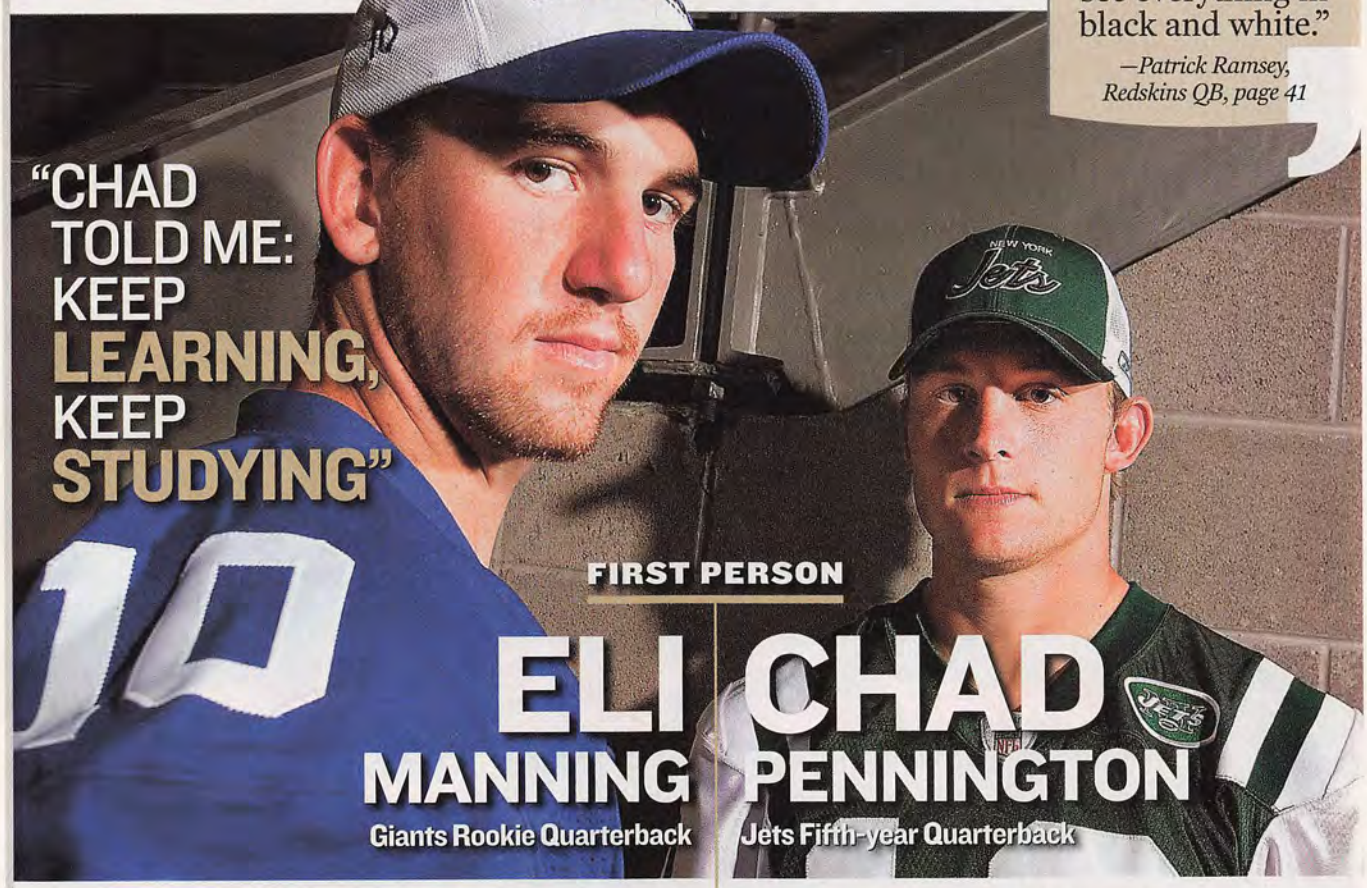
SI Players

Edited by
KOSTYA KENNEDY

"Sometimes after a big hit you'll see everything in black and white."

—Patrick Ramsey, Redskins QB, page 41



"CHAD TOLD ME: KEEP LEARNING, KEEP STUDYING"

FIRST PERSON

ELI MANNING

Giants Rookie Quarterback

"• **ON HIS NEW HOMETOWN** I live in Hoboken, N.J., where Frank Sinatra was from. My favorite Sinatra song is *New York, New York.*

• **ON WHETHER HIS PARENTS WILL TAILGATE AT GIANTS STADIUM AS THEY DID AT OLE MISS** No. They're going to try to be more low-key. The Ole Miss Grove was easy for them, and for me, I could go there after games and not get harassed or bothered that much.

• **ON NEW YORK FANS** They're very into football. They love the Giants, and the games sell out every time. But I've heard they can turn on you really quick.

• **ON SOUTHERN FOOD UP NORTH** I tried one place that was all right, but I haven't found anything that compares to real Southern cooking.

• **ON ADVICE FROM CHAD PENNINGTON** He had a similar situation as a rookie—he sat. He said whatever happens, to keep studying, don't take it easy. Keep learning and keep studying, and it will all click one day.

• **ON THE NFL'S BEST QB** Maybe I'm biased, but I enjoy watching my brother.

• **ON GETTING LEVELED BY EAGLES DT DARWIN WALKER** I just hope that got my big hit out of the way, and I won't have to deal with one bigger than that.

• **ON BEING COACHED BY DISCIPLINARIAN TOM COUGHLIN** I don't mind being yelled at. I like being coached. I like a coach who's hands-on, who'll let you know when you make mistakes."

CHAD PENNINGTON

Jets Fifth-year Quarterback

"• **ON LIFE IN NEW YORK** The first thing I learned was to drive quickly because if you don't, you will get run over. I also love Christmas in the city. I go to see the Rockettes' *Christmas Spectacular* at Radio City Music Hall every year. In New York there's something new every day, some new little hole in the wall.

• **ON NEW YORK FANS** Very, very passionate. Sometimes their passion comes off as negative because they live and die with you every play, every game. When you're winning, and they're pulling for you, that's a really good thing.

• **ON SOUTHERN FOOD UP NORTH** Well, down South [he grew up in Knoxville, Tenn.] you're used to chains. And up here you better know somebody to find out where to go. My goal was to put a Cracker Barrel up here, but Cracker Barrel doesn't franchise. So no starting any Cracker Barrels up here for me.

• **ON ADVICE FOR ELI MANNING** Three rules: Don't read, listen to or watch anything about New York sports or your team. And if you do, don't believe any of it. You have to believe in yourself, and you can't forget about the things that have gotten you to where you are. Just because you're in a big city and playing at the highest level of competition, it doesn't mean you can forget those little things your family taught you along the way. Those things don't change."

—As told to Lisa Altobelli

THIS SUNDAY, ELI IS TO BACK UP KURT WARNER AS THE GIANTS PLAY IN DALLAS; CHAD AND THE JETS (3–0) HOST BUFFALO

JEFF ZELEVANSKY/ICON SMI (MANNING/PENNINGTON); WILLIAM E. AMATUCCI/WIREIMAGE (RAMSEY)

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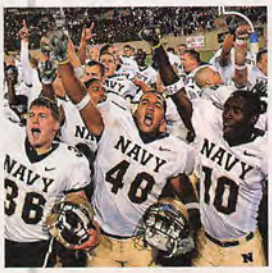
WHO'S Hot

Emmitt Smith

O.K., he's not the Emmitt of old—but at 35 the alltime rushing leader turned in a game for the ages. His 77th 100-yard game tied Walter Payton's NFL record and made him the oldest back to gain more than 100 since Marcus Allen in '95. He had a touchdown reception, ran for a score and, get this, threw a 21-yard TD on his first career pass. For one sweet day in the Arizona sun, Emmitt gave the Cardinals every bit of their money's worth.

Massachusetts

The Pats have only to beat the Dolphins for the win-streak record, the Red Sox are in the playoffs for the second straight year and what a week for homegrown talent: Conan O'Brien was anointed *Tonight Show* successor, and debate champ John Kerry pulled even with Dubya.



Midshipmen

Navy's late field goal beat rival Air Force, making the team 5–0 and putting it on the verge of the Commander in Chief's Trophy. NFL's lone Navy alum, guard Mike Wahle, remains a rare bright spot on the Packers.

Green Day

Look who's No. 1—on The *Billboard* 200. The title track of the punk band's bestselling rock opera *American Idiot* debuted on *Madden 2005* in August.

Kurt Warner

It's not where he is—contending in the NFC East after guiding the Giants to three consecutive wins—so much as where he's been. Before beating the Redskins on Sept. 19, he'd gone nearly two years without a victory and endured talk-radio hell in St. Louis, where wife Brenda carped about his playing time, and in New York, where cries rang out for the Eli era to begin.

WHO'S Not

Oakland

The A's slinked out of the playoff race, and the Raiders (2–2) have now lost 11 straight road games. They head to Indianapolis this week, and with Rich Gannon down and backup Kerry Collins tossing interceptions, the force is definitely not with Al Davis these days.

Chicago

North Side, South Side, there's just no relief. It's not only Da Bears (they're 1–3 with quarterback troubles—yes, again!), it's the Cubbies (Oh, the humanity!) and those lackluster Chisox.

David Hasselhoff

Ten years after his long-awaited pay-per-view concert was eclipsed by O.J.'s Bronco run, ex-*Baywatch* stud and Dan Marino look-alike accepts role as lifeguard in SpongeBob SquarePants movie.

Green Bay

Look who's No. 4—in the NFC North. With Brett Favre banged up, the Packers are 1–3 for the first time since '93 and 0–2 at home, making Vegas oddsmakers look like American idiots.

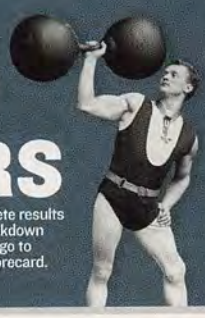
Compassion

NFL prohibits Broncos QB Jake Plummer from wearing sticker honoring his late ex-teammate Pat Tillman, Panthers fine running back Rod Smart for missing practice while with his family in Florida during Hurricane Jeanne and Bill Parcells's tyrannical style gets glorified on *60 Minutes*.

SI PLAYERS POLL

(Based on a survey of 354 players)

For complete results and a breakdown of the poll go to si.com/scorecard.

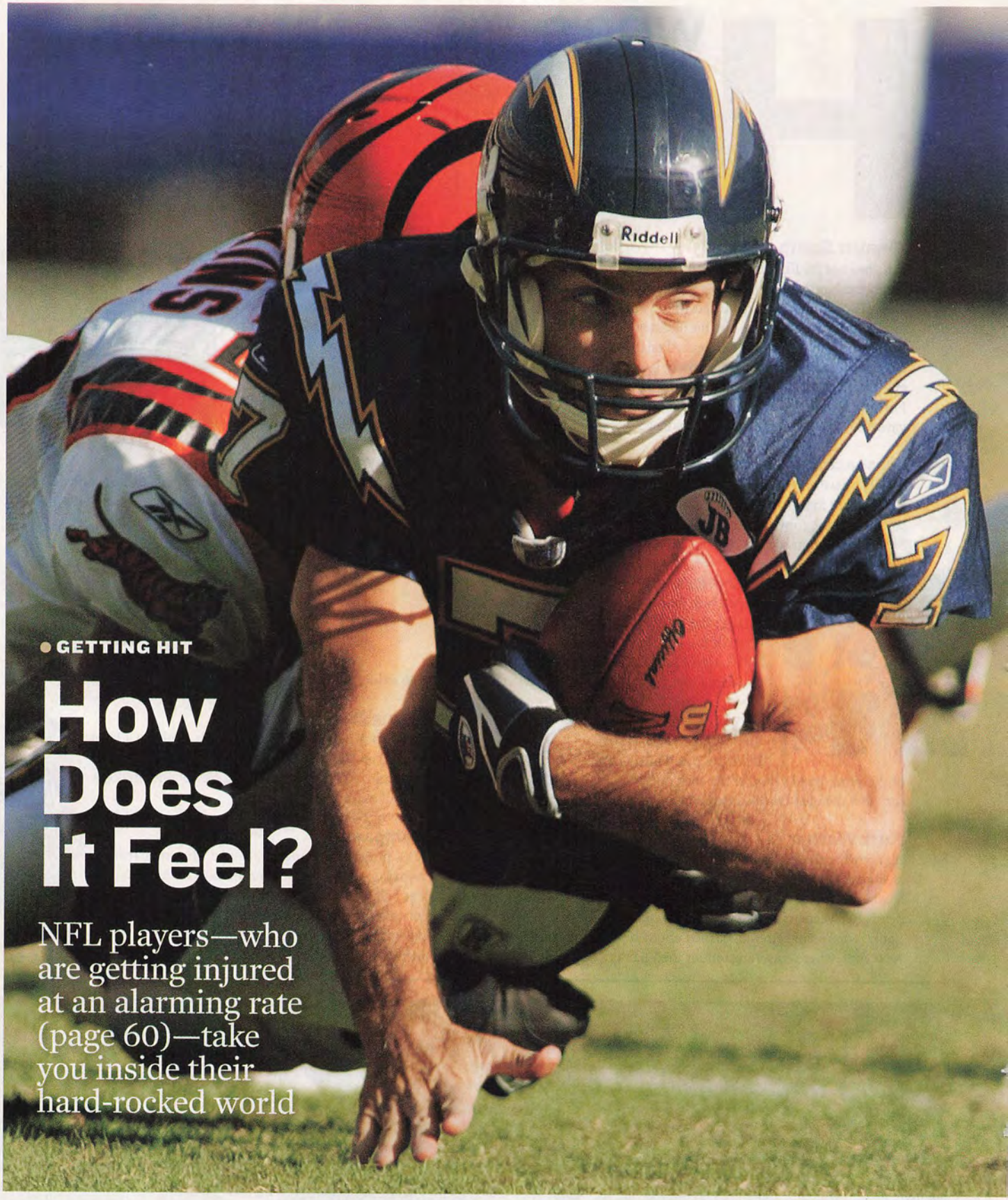


Who is the strongest player in the NFL?

Larry Allen *Guard, Cowboys*	**25%**
John Parrella *Defensive tackle, Raiders*	8%
Ted Washington *Defensive tackle, Raiders*	6%
Michael Strahan *Defensive end, Giants*	5%

FAST FACTS Allen—who's 6′ 3″, 335 pounds—set Cowboys records by benching 700 pounds and squatting 900 pounds. He's made the Pro Bowl seven times. . . . Washington (6′ 5″, 365) was a Florida high school state wrestling champ in the unlimited weight class.

TODD ROSENBERG/ICON SMI (SMITH); JACK DEMPSEY/AP (NAVY); WARNER BROS. (GREEN DAY); HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION/CORBIS (STRONG MAN); JAMES D. SMITH/WIREIMAGE (ALLEN); ANDY MANIS/WIREIMAGE (FAVRE); MEL BOUZAD/GETTY IMAGES (SPONGEBOB); ANDERS KRUSBERG/AP (HASSELHOFF); TONY GONZALES/OAKLAND RAIDERS (VADER/DAVIS)



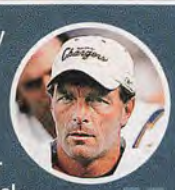
GETTING HIT

How Does It Feel?

NFL players—who are getting injured at an alarming rate (page 60)—take you inside their hard-rocked world

Some of the textbook big hits look worse than they are. If you see it coming, you adjust your body to make it less violent. What really hurts is somebody who's 300 pounds lying on you. Sometimes after a big hit you'll see everything in black and white. Once against New Orleans, I got hit so hard by one of their big guys that I came up screaming—not *at* anyone, but just trying to shake it off. Sometimes you don't know what's going on. You check if everything is still functioning and try to regain your composure to run the next play. If you *can't* continue, you don't want to get up because you want to give the guy on the sideline the chance to warm up. **PATRICK RAMSEY, QB, *REDSKINS***

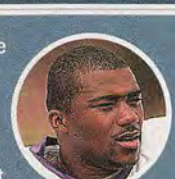
It's like a car wreck because however long the hit lasts there's a period of time when you're out of control. You don't know where you're going—if you're going to crack your head on the ground or if you're going to knock into somebody. You tighten up, like being in a car accident, when you grip the door handle and just hang on. Your eyes close, you go into a fetal position as best you can. When it's over, you do a mental inventory of your body parts, if you can, and you relive what happened a split second ago. Did my knee break? Did my leg break? Did my back break? If it's serious, you know immediately. **STEVE TASKER, FORMER WR, *BILLS***



Because of my small size [5′ 10″] I have to get down in a hurry when I know I'm going to get hit. Usually my body is loose and relaxed, and my focus is up the field. When someone is going to hit you, you let your body go. You tuck one shoulder. Sometimes I'll turn and take the blow on my face mask rather than on my shoulder because when you have 350 pounds driving your shoulder into the ground, something is going to give. I trust the helmet more than I do my shoulder. **DOUG FLUTIE, QB *CHARGERS***

I've had ones where I got the wind totally knocked out of me, and I thought, I've got to get up; don't let them see that I'm hurt. But then it's, O.K., wait, never mind, forget that. When you get your bell rung the first few times, especially early in the season, you get blurry vision, and it lasts for maybe 10 or 15 minutes, but it's not a big deal. Guys talk about that as "getting their cobwebs cleared." Once I get that blurry vision a couple of times, though, I'm fine. I play through it. **DREW BENNETT, WR, *TITANS***

It's the grazing ones that hurt the most. When you're coming across the middle and someone clips you—chicken-bones you—and then you're parallel to the ground and then you hit the ground hard, you're like, Gol-ly! Those big, head-to-head, solid ones, when they get a good shot on you, are O.K. as long as you catch the ball. Those make you feel alive, get you into the game. It's weird like that. When some 260-pound guy hits you dead-on, you get fired up. Not to be masochistic, but as long as it's clean, it's fun. **WAYNE CHREBET, WR, *JETS***



It all depends upon how you get hit. Sometimes it feels like one side of your body is numb for a minute, and sometimes it's kind of like falling off a bicycle—you get hit and you just bounce right back up. My rookie year I got hit by Bears linebacker Brian Urlacher on a screen play. He came through and cleaned my clock. From my neck down I didn't have any feeling for a few seconds. I forgot where I was. It was terrible. I had to lie there for a little while, wait for my feeling to come back. When I did get up, my head was spinning. He was like, "Welcome to the NFL, rookie." **MICHAEL BENNETT, RB, *VIKINGS***

Video Matchup

Who'll win on Monday night? In a preview, Packers CB Mike McKenzie and Titans LB Keith Bulluck played EA Sports Madden 2005 *on Xbox Live.*

PACKERS VS. TITANS

MIKE MCKENZIE
CORNERBACK

McKENZIE, TRADED by the Packers on Monday, was all business for this matchup, spending 10 minutes before the kickoff working on his video punting and kicking skills in his Green Bay hotel room. Yet it was to no avail. While Bulluck, clad in a red T-shirt and baggy jeans shorts and playing in Tennessee, used alltime scoring leader Gary Anderson to boot a 52-yard field goal in the first quarter, McKenzie failed to convert on two long attempts by Ryan Longwell. "I gave [McKenzie] confidence with my 52-yarder," Bulluck said, "but he's forgetting I've got the living legend." Bulluck also held his virtual self in high regard, editing himself into the game's goal line and dime packages and using himself to repeatedly blitz Brett Favre. The strategy kept the Packers off the board, and the score was 3–0 at the half.

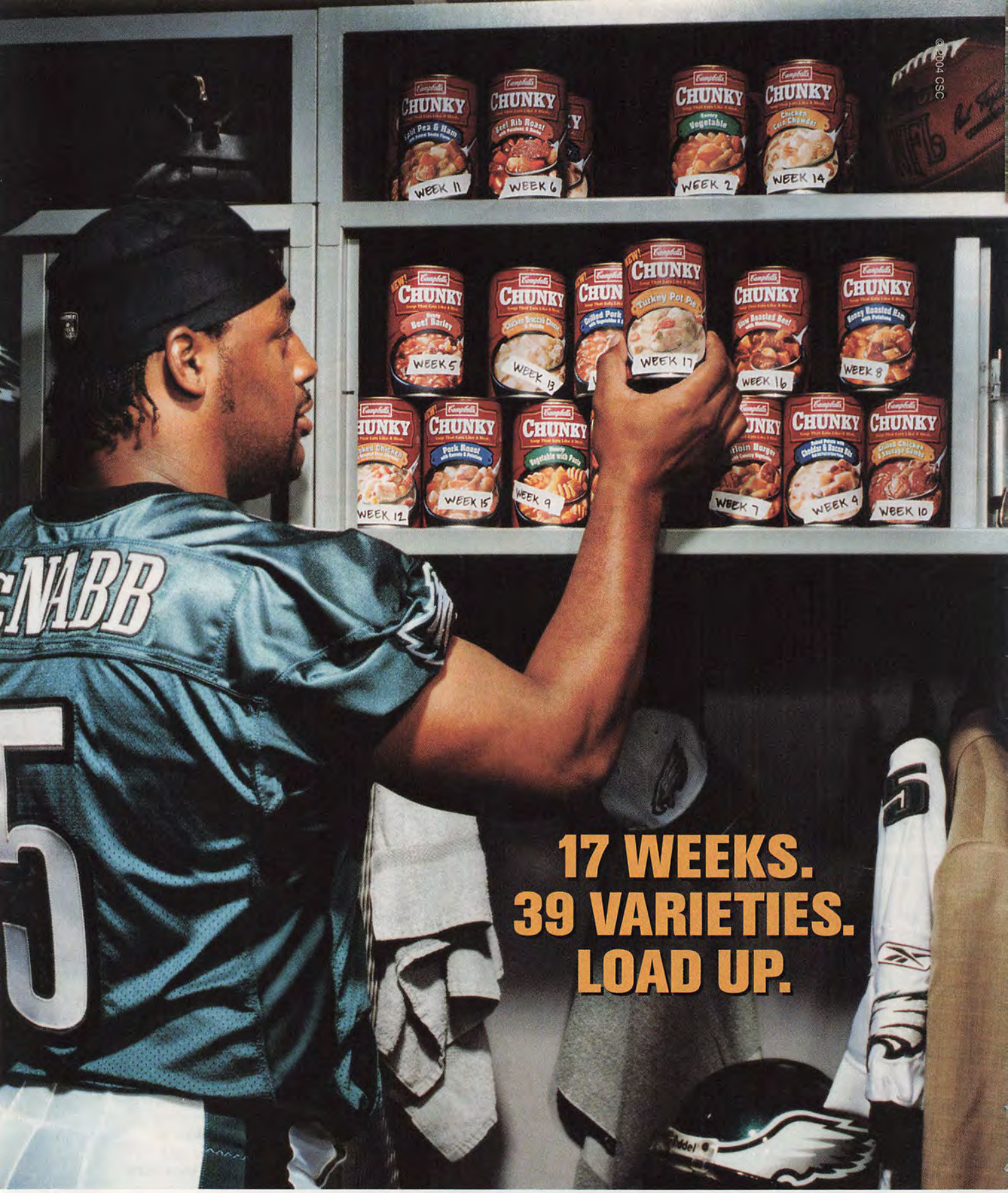
On a Lambeau Field so cold you could see the players' breath, a defensive battle was in the making, but McKenzie chose not to control his video double. "I don't want to be myself," he said. "The computer will do a much better job." In the second half, however, neither man nor machine could stop Bulluck, who had Steve McNair throw scoring passes of 54 and 36 yards and got a rushing TD from Chris Brown. "This is a drubbing—I'm going to blow him out," Bulluck said when he was up 17–0 in the third. He was right.

TITANS 24, PACKERS 0

KEITH BULLUCK
TITANS LINEBACKER

The winner of SI Players' weekly Video Matchup has gone 1–2 on Monday nights.

STAN LUI/ICON SMI (FLUTIE, ACTION); WILLIAM E. AMATUCCI/WIREIMAGE.COM (RAMSEY); GENE J. PUSKAR/AP (TASKER); TRACY FRANKEL/WIREIMAGE (FLUTIE); DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP (D. BENNETT); ED BETZ/AP (CHREBET); TOM DAHLIN/WIREIMAGE (M. BENNETT); NFL PROPERTIES (2); EA SPORTS (MADDEN 2005); JONATHAN DANIEL/GETTY IMAGES (MCKENZIE); ELSA/GETTY IMAGES (BULLOCK)



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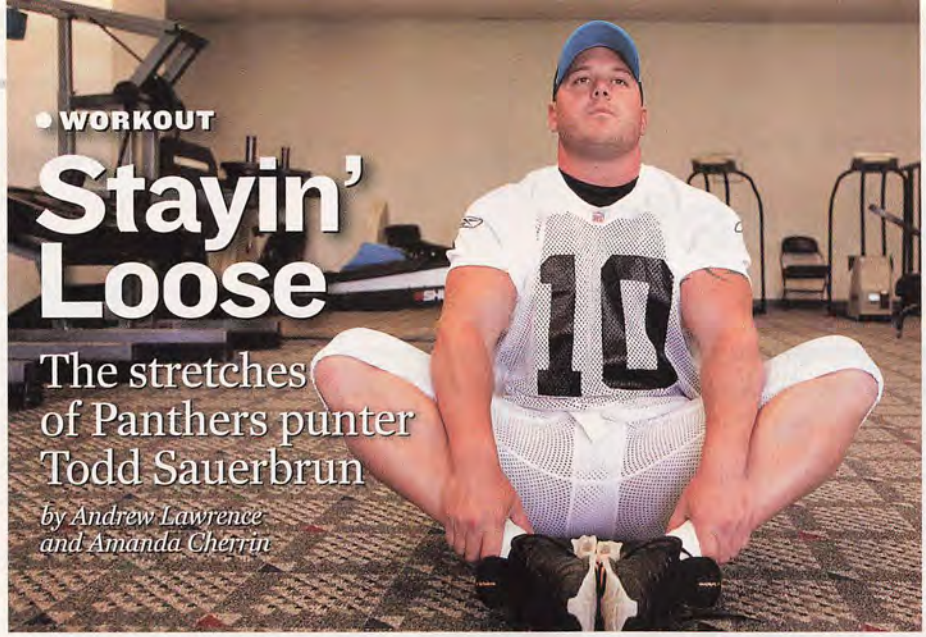


WORKOUT

Stayin' Loose

The stretches of Panthers punter Todd Sauerbrun

by Andrew Lawrence and Amanda Cherrin

AT 5' 10", 215 POUNDS, Todd Sauerbrun doesn't have a punter's physique. "He's unique because he's so compact," Carolina coach John Fox has said. Yet like his longer, leaner colleagues, Sauerbrun, 32, needs to stay limber, which is why he does very little weight training during the season and a whole lot of stretching. "I'm not naturally a flexible person," he says, "so I need to spend a little more time [stretching] than most people." What he's doing must work—Sauerbrun has made the last three Pro Bowls, while becoming the first player to lead the NFC in punting average for three straight seasons.

QUAD TUCK Sauerbrun began doing these stretches in high school—at Ward Melville, on Long Island in New York, where he was an All-America midfielder on the perennial lacrosse powerhouse—and for the past 13 years this has been a staple before workouts. It targets the quadriceps and hip flexor muscles. Sauerbrun holds the position for 10 seconds. "For a punter this one's pretty much a necessity," he says.

HAMMY WHAMMY Before and after each workout Sauerbrun finds a shoulder-height machine (in theory he could use a shelf or anything that high) on which he stretches both his right (kicking) and left legs. He holds each stretch for at least 10 seconds while pulling his head toward his knee. The exercise works the hamstring and lower back and helps develop a quality essential for good punting: Sauerbrun calls it the key stretch for "giving me the height that I need on my leg swing."

KARATE STRETCH In the Panthers' training room Sauerbrun has little competition for this leg-stretching apparatus. Favored by those who do martial arts, it stretches the groin and lower back. Sauerbrun cranks open the machine, pulls his torso forward and holds this position for several minutes before practice and games. Says Sauerbrun, "It's so comfortable, I'll drink a cup of coffee while working out on that thing."

MR. VEGGIE

CHIDI AHANOTU, *DOLPHINS DEFENSIVE END*

THERE ARE no vegetarians in the NFL, but there is Chidi Ahanotu, the Dolphins defensive end who hasn't tasted red meat or chicken in seven years—a very lean cuisine for a guy who goes 6' 2", 285. Ahanotu's staples are vegetables, seafood and soy products, and he alternates between meals rich in carbohydrates and meals rich in proteins. Ahanotu, 34, was a vegan in high school in Berkeley, Calif.—eschewing all animal products, including dairy—before he began eating meat to beef up for football at Cal. Then, in his fifth NFL season, he became a self-described "seafood vegetarian" for "digestive and ethical reasons." He hasn't missed a game in six seasons. "I feel great," says Ahanotu, whose food faves are "crab, sweet potatoes and carrot juice." Still, it isn't easy eating greens in a meat-and-potatoes league. "When you say you're a vegetarian, people think you should look like a marathon runner," Ahanotu says. "Guys tease me and say, 'Man, I saw you last night at a steak house.' Like I'm a closet steak-eater." —A.C.

The Questions with Ray Buchanan

Raiders Cornerback

What was your welcome-to-the-NFL moment? "When I walked into my first OTA—organized team activity—and saw all of those players. Running out on the field the first time was the icing."

Most embarrassing moment? "When Patrick Johnson [of the Ravens] caught a touchdown pass on me in 1999. I was lying on the ground, and he started doing the dirty bird dance over me. I lost it—I jumped up and picked him up and body-slammed him. Of course, I got ejected and fined."

Favorite off-day activity? "I love bowling. I average, like, 180. On Tuesdays during the season I get my brothers and go roll."

If I weren't in the NFL, I'd be . . . "On TV. Commentating. I am definitely going to do that after I retire."

Last Week

Four days after turning 33, Buchanan made seven tackles in a loss to Houston.

This Week

The Raiders go to Indianapolis, where Buchanan played from 1993 to '96 and led the team with eight interceptions in '94.

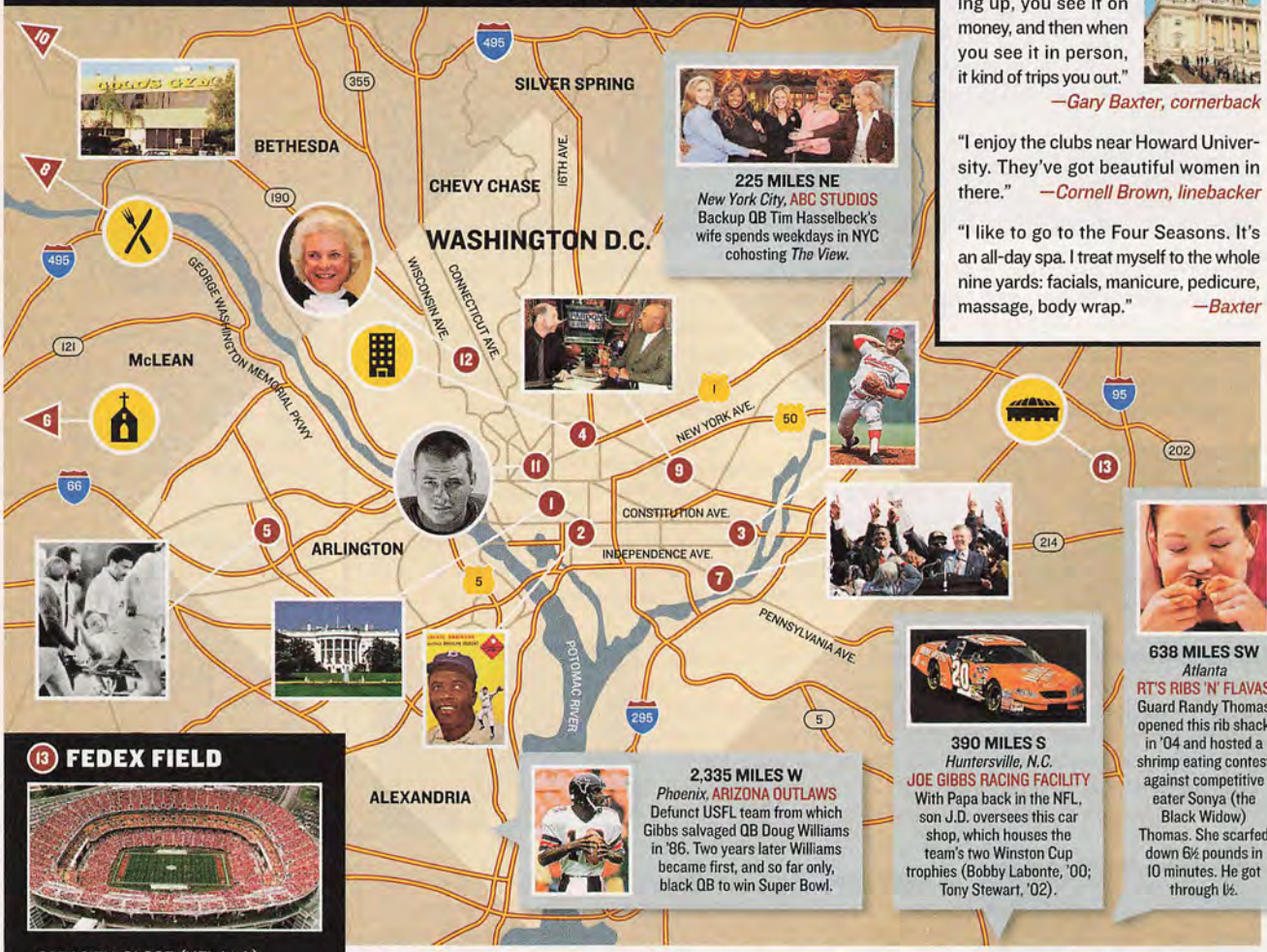
BEN VAN HOOK (SAUERBRUN, 4); DAVID PAUL MORRIS/GETTY IMAGES (BUCHANAN HEAD SHOT); JAMES D. SMITH/WIREIMAGE (BUCHANAN ACTION); CORBIS (STEAK); FERNANDO MEDINA/WIREIMAGE (AHANOTU)

● NFL ROAD TRIP: WASHINGTON, D.C.

Capital's Assets

Pigskin, politics, and baseball's coming back. Welcome to Hog heaven

OCT. 10 >> BALTIMORE RAVENS AT WASHINGTON REDSKINS >> 8:30 P.M. EST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WISCONSIN AVE.
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GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PKWY
NEW YORK AVE.
CONSTITUTION AVE.
INDEPENDENCE AVE.
PENNSYLVANIA AVE.
POTOMAC RIVER
225 MILES NE
New York City, ABC STUDIOS
Backup QB Tim Hasselbeck's wife spends weekdays in NYC cohosting The View.
638 MILES SW
Atlanta
RT'S RIBS 'N' FLAVAS
Guard Randy Thomas opened this rib shack in '04 and hosted a shrimp eating contest against competitive eater Sonya (the Black Widow) Thomas. She scarfed down 6½ pounds in 10 minutes. He got through ½.
390 MILES S
Huntersville, N.C.
JOE GIBBS RACING FACILITY
With Papa back in the NFL, son J.D. oversees this car shop, which houses the team's two Winston Cup trophies (Bobby Labonte, '00; Tony Stewart, '02).
2,335 MILES W
Phoenix, ARIZONA OUTLAWS
Defunct USFL team from which Gibbs salvaged QB Doug Williams in '86. Two years later Williams became first, and so far only, black QB to win Super Bowl.

13 FEDEX FIELD

- CAPACITY: 91,665 (NFL high)
- ANTHEM SINGER AT SEPT. 14, 1997, OPENER: Mary Chapin Carpenter (Skins win in OT, 19–13)
- QUARTERS PER GAME: 5. The fifth, by tradition, unfolds at club level's Wild Goose Landing; bands perform
- CLUB LEVEL TABLE SERVICE AREA: 15,472 seating capacity; world's largest waiter service area
- ON-SITE FEDEX DROP BOXES: 1

Visitors' View

The Ravens on Washington

"The funniest thing about D.C. is when I see the nation's Capitol. When you're growing up, you see it on money, and then when you see it in person, it kind of trips you out." —*Gary Baxter, cornerback*

"I enjoy the clubs near Howard University. They've got beautiful women in there." —*Cornell Brown, linebacker*

"I like to go to the Four Seasons. It's an all-day spa. I treat myself to the whole nine yards: facials, manicure, pedicure, massage, body wrap." —*Baxter*

[1] WHITE HOUSE Where Clinton, Kennedy and Roosevelt (Teddy) played football on the lawn and Reagan made the Super Bowl XIX coin toss. **[2] SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY** Now showing: "Sports: Breaking Records, Breaking Barriers," a display of mementos from athletes who left their mark on society. Ogle Jordan's jerseys, Ali's robe and the Babe's home run balls. **[3] RFK STADIUM** Next spring, baseball returns after 34 years. In '71, with one out left in the Senators' last game in D.C., fans stormed field and took bases and turf. **[4] CHANDELIER ROOM, SHERATON-CARLTON HOTEL** Vince Lombardi held his first press conference as Skins coach here in '69, saying, "I can't walk across the Potomac, not even when it's frozen." After going 7-5-2 in one season, Lombardi succumbed to cancer. **[5] ARLINGTON HOSPITAL** Hospital where Joe Theismann got a call the day after Lawrence Taylor broke his leg on *Monday Night Football* in 1985. It was LT. "I don't do things halfway," he explained. **[6] TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH CEMETERY** (Upperville, Va.) In '97 owner Jack Kent Cooke's ashes were buried in the town John Updike wrote of in his poem *Upon Learning That a Town Exists Called Upperville.* **[7] PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE** Thrice-traveled Super Bowl parade route. **[8] SWEETWATER TAVERN** QB Patrick Ramsey says the grilled fish is "almost" as good as back home in Ruston, La. **[9] WASHINGTON TELEVISION CENTER** Home of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives—and the same building where elite ranters (and *Washington Post* columnists) Tony Kornheiser and Michael Wilbon tape *Pardon the Interruption.* **[10] GOLD'S GYM** In off-season wideout James Thrash, certified by the National Strength Professionals Association, worked here as a conditioning specialist. **[11] MAYFLOWER HOTEL** Where LB Sam Huff roomed with aptly named running back Joe Don Looney in the '60s. The team gave Huff $1,500 annually to keep Looney out of trouble. One year Huff lost the money when the two brawled at a practice. **[12] WASHINGTON SHERATON** At the '85 White House Press Club dinner, John Riggins passed out after urging Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to "Loosen up, Sandy baby." —*Adam Duerson*

J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP (THEISMANN); JASON KIRK/NEWSMAKERS (GOLDS); HARRY CABLUCK/AP (SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR); STEVE FENN/ABC/AP (THE VIEW); LINDA SPILLERS (PTI); MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES (CAPITAL); FRED KAPLAN (MCLAIN); JESSICA GRIFFIN/AP (WING BOWL); DONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES (CAR); TONY TOMSIC (WILLIAMS); DOUG MILLS/AP (PARADE); MARK GOLDMAN/ICON SMI (HOGETTE); ERIC F. LONG/SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE (ROBINSON); DENNIS MACDONALD (WHITE HOUSE); LARRY MORRIS/THE WASHINGTON POST (FEDEX FIELD)

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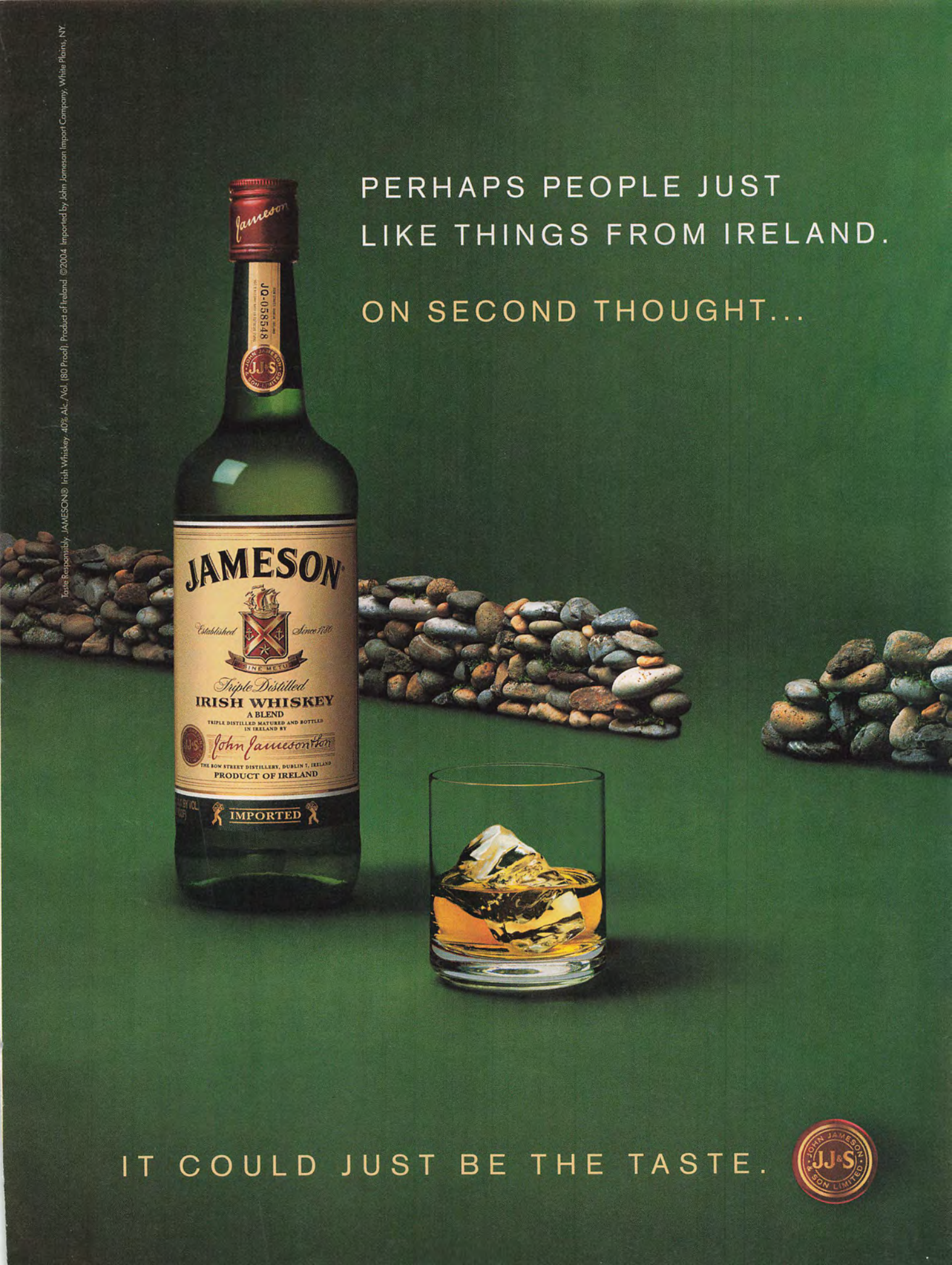
PERHAPS PEOPLE JUST
LIKE THINGS FROM IRELAND.

ON SECOND THOUGHT...

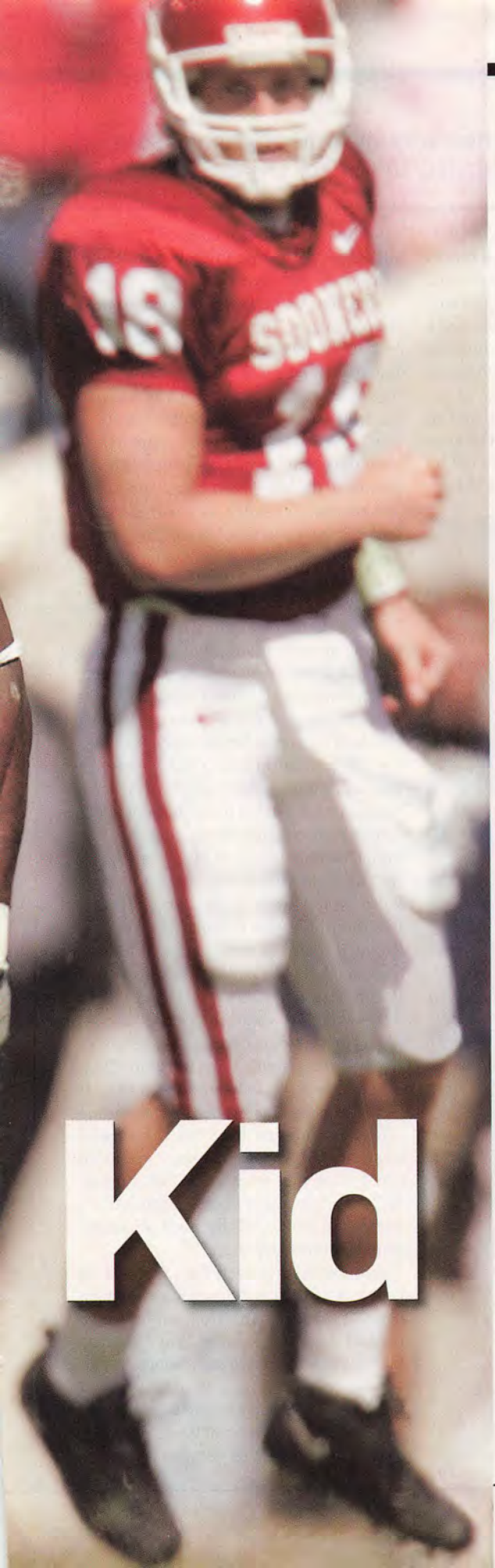


IT COULD JUST BE THE TASTE.

Sports Illustrated

The Oklahoma

SWEEPING DOWN THE PLAIN Peterson has roared out of the gate with four straight 100-yard rushing games.



Kid

The Sooners are suddenly running wild thanks to true freshman Adrian Peterson, the best tailback prospect in a generation. Can Texas stop him?

BY AUSTIN MURPHY

Photograph by John Biever

THEY TALK about his burst, his speed, his tremendous vision, but Adrian Peterson never saw this hit coming. He was waylaid not by a strong safety or a blitzing linebacker, but—this would be funny if it weren't so sad—a boy band. Today he is Oklahoma's freshman tailback sensation. Two summers ago Peterson was 17 and on a bus traveling from his home in Palestine, Texas, to a track meet in Florida. Through his headphones came a song sung by Boyz II Men:

I thought we'd get to see forever,
But forever's gone away.
It's so hard to say goodbye to yesterday.

That tune yanked Adrian a decade back in time, to the afternoon when he was seven years old and watched a drunk driver take the life of his brother Brian, then 11. Suddenly, and to the astonishment of his track buddies, the usually stoic Peterson was sobbing inconsolably.

"He told me that he was listening to a song that reminded him of Brian and all the good times they used to have," recalls Adrian's mother, Bonita Jackson (née Brown), who phoned him later that night. "I told him it was good to talk about it, to let it go." She reminded him what Paul told the Philippians: God gives you peace that surpasseth all understanding.

Seven years after he lost his brother, Adrian said goodbye to his father. Nelson Peterson—who'd nicknamed his son AD because, given the chance, the kid would play sports all day—was sentenced to 10 years in prison for laundering money from the sale of crack cocaine. He is scheduled to be released in April 2007.

The human spirit is strong, and the boy who absorbed these blows grew into a happy, well-adjusted young man. People back in Palestine (pronounced Pal-uh-STEEN) are not surprised that Peterson set a Sooners record by rushing for more than 100 yards in each of his first four games as a collegian; they are not surprised to have seen him break tackles against Oregon and Texas Tech the way he broke them on Friday nights against Whitehouse and Nacogdoches.

"I don't want to think that I can hang my head and people will understand because, you know, my dad's not here and my brother's gone," Peterson says. "I'm not going to give in to that. Instead of hanging my head, I make myself do better."

He shared this credo in a hallway of the Barry Switzer Center last Saturday, an hour after No. 2 Oklahoma's 28–13 win over Texas Tech. Earlier, in a

"I don't want to hang my head because my dad's not here and my brother's gone," says Peterson. "I'm not going to give in to that. Instead, I **MAKE MYSELF DO BETTER.**"

rowdy Sooners locker room, coach Bob Stoops had played Santa Claus, giving out game balls, including one to Jason White. The senior quarterback had thrown the 53rd, 54th and 55th touchdown passes of his career, moving him past Josh Heupel into first place on Oklahoma's alltime list, a "remarkable feat," wisecracked offensive coordinator Chuck Long, "considering the short time he's been here." This is White's sixth season in Norman.

The day White set the record was also the day that marked a sea change in Oklahoma's offense. While it was the fourth game in which Peterson had gone over the century mark—he finished with 146 yards and a touchdown on 22 carries, and had a 57-yarder called back on a holding penalty—Saturday was his first collegiate start. His coaches made a show of explaining that the freshman got the nod on account of the tender ankles of the erstwhile starter, junior Kejaun Jones, but let there be no doubt: Saturday was the beginning of the AD era at OU. Peterson is the horse Oklahoma intends to ride into December, and beyond.

O.K. BY HIM The Sooners' improved ground game has taken the heat off White, who is passing less and—so far—staying healthy.

PETER READ MILLER

The Sooners ran him on seven of their first 12 plays. They ran him when Tech loaded the box against the run. They ran him in passing situations. They didn't care. The strategy reflected what Long had told his fellow assistants before the season: "I don't give a damn what [our opponents] are doing and how many people they're putting in the box—we're gonna run it, and just because they stuff it once or twice, we're gonna keep running it." An offense whose best play had been White to wide receiver Mark Clayton looked, all of a sudden, like Nebraska's during the Bob Devaney days.

The change is likely to result in White's putting up more modest numbers than he did in '03, his Heisman season. (His three touchdowns against the Red Raiders, for instance, came on just 24 passes.) It should also help him enjoy better health. Remember White at the end of 2003? So swollen and sore were his surgically reconstructed knees that he couldn't push out from under center. Forced to play White from the shotgun, Oklahoma became overly reliant on the pass. The withering of its ground game killed off the threat of play action. Having lost their offensive balance, the Sooners dropped their last two games, to Kansas State and LSU. Stoops and his staff swore in the off-season: Never again.

Never again would they suffer the indignity of presiding over an offense unable to play smashmouth when it had to. Oklahoma rededicated itself to the run. It helped that the Sooners had all five starting offensive linemen back for the second straight year. And those hogs are more ornery than they were in '03. "It's a mindset," says right guard Davin Joseph, a 6' 4", 312-pound junior. "It's having a certain attitude on third and short."

Another key has been White's return to health. A tailback is more effective taking a handoff from a quarterback who receives the ball from under center. Why? Because the back gets a running start before the ball

is in his hands. He is running, as the talking heads like to say, downhill. To get back under center, White needed his knees to heal. They have. With his last surgery two years in his past, White is pain free and playing without the knee braces that he essentially lived in last season. A year ago he was unable to take the lunge-step necessary to make a handoff on a stretch play—a staple of any offense. Not only can he run that play this year, but he also can fake the handoff and take it outside himself.

When you're planning to reemphasize your ground game, it's always nice to have a bead on a once-in-a-generation talent at tailback. Darrell Wyatt coaches wide receivers for the Sooners. His recruiting territory is East Texas. In the fall of 2002 he sent back word of a freakishly talented schoolboy from Palestine, an old railroad town 100 miles southeast of Dallas.

Bonita moved from Dallas to Palestine shortly after the death of Brian, who was hit by a car while riding his bike. "I was a wreck for a long while," says Bonita, who split with Nelson Peterson in 1991 and married Frankie Jackson, a minister, five years later. "That was a hard time for Adrian. [He and Brian] were so close, it was like part of him that we were burying."

When his father was packed off to the Federal Correctional Institute in Texarkana, Adrian "rebelled for a while," says his mother. "Sometimes he was just mad at the world." He hit a rough patch in ninth grade at Westwood High, his mother's alma mater. Adrian tore a ligament in his right knee early in the football season and began drifting academically. His parents thought it best that he transfer across town to Palestine High. As a sophomore he practiced with the football team, but because of his grades he was ineligible to play in games. The Wildcats' coaches still had no inkling of what they had. Jeff Harrell, who coached football and track, caught glimpses that spring. Peterson went out for track and proved a natural sprinter. (In 1983 Bonita won the triple jump, long jump and 100 and 200 meters at the Texas 3A track meet; since then, June 11 has been Bonita Brown Day at Westwood High.) It was as if, between fall and spring, Adrian had crossed the threshold to manhood. He ran 10.6 in the 100 meters and reached the finals of the state 4A meet.

Peterson's first touch in the first football practice of his junior year has become mythical in Wildcats lore. "When he hit the line of scrimmage," says Harrell, "all the

DARREN CARROLL

Horn of Plenty

Texas tailback Cedric Benson is the nation's leading rusher, but can he lead the Longhorns to a victory over OU?

TEXAS SENIOR running back Cedric Benson paused to think about the question and then, in a hushed tone only a librarian could love, answered, "My head's right." That, in Benson's view, at least, is why he's having his best season and has emerged as a leading candidate for the Heisman Trophy as the fifth-ranked Longhorns enter their annual showdown with No. 2 Oklahoma on Saturday in Dallas.

After rushing for 3,706 yards and 45 touchdowns in his first three seasons, Benson is putting together the kind of year that earns invitations to black-tie dinners in December. The 6-foot 217-pounder leads the nation in rushing with 186.5 yards per game and is averaging 7.6 yards per carry.

There are reasons for Benson's dominance besides his positive state of mind. He's coming off a summer during which, for the first time, he focused totally on football and was a regular participant in the team's voluntary workouts. (Benson spent parts of the previous three summers as a minor league infielder-outfielder for the Los Angeles Dodgers.) Texas also has its best offensive line since 1998, the year Ricky Williams won the Heisman. Moreover, the running ability of sophomore quarterback Vince Young has helped spread opposing defenses.

But mainly Benson says he has matured and learned from his mistakes. Last October he was arrested and charged with criminal trespassing after kicking down an apartment door in an attempt to recover a plasma TV he had reported stolen a year earlier. He pleaded no contest. "I'm 21 now, and when I got [to Texas] I was 18," he says. "There have been a lot of hurdles. A lot of lessons came along with those hurdles."

The NFL likes what it sees in Benson. C.O. Brocato, a Dallas-based scout for the Tennessee Titans who has covered the Southwest and Midwest for 30 years, believes Benson is a better pro prospect than Williams was. Brocato ranks Benson behind only Texas's Earl Campbell and Oklahoma State's Barry Sanders among the best running backs to come out of his region during his scouting tenure. "He's got the speed," Brocato says. "He's got great feet and quickness."

What he doesn't have is a mute button. In August 2003 he told the Austin media that he was "not really feeling respected" by Texas players and coaches. Then last month, Benson was asked by ESPN Radio host Doug Gottlieb whether it would mean more to him to win the Heisman or beat Oklahoma for the first time in his career.

Without hesitation, Benson said it would mean more to win the Heisman. In Austin, where Longhorns fans have suffered four straight losses to the Sooners, Benson's comment was as welcome as Kansas City barbecue. Radio shows and Internet message boards were swamped with responses from fans who called Benson selfish. In Benson's mind he was merely being honest. "Everyone says things just to make yourself feel good," he says. "I just tell the truth."

THE I OF TEXAS Benson's admission that the Heisman means more to him than a Red River win burned ears in Austin.

The truth is, Benson won't win the Heisman if he doesn't beat Oklahoma, and Texas can't win without a Heisman-calibre performance from Benson. —*Gene Menez*

Sleeping Dawgs No More

Inspired by a devastating defense, Georgia roused itself against LSU and looked like a national title contender

BEFORE THE season, Thomas Davis's Georgia teammates quietly negotiated a deal with him: The 6' 1", 220-pound junior safety is not allowed to unleash his trademark rib-crunching hits in practice. "It's a matter of survival," says senior wide receiver Fred Gibson. "That boy will run a hole right through you."

LSU—not exactly high on any Dawg's best-friend list—found that out the hard way last Saturday. Led by the pile-driving Davis, the Georgia defense ran the Tigers into the Sanford Stadium turf in a 45–16 win that exacted revenge for last season's two demoralizing losses to LSU. The game was much like the 2003 regular-season matchup between the two teams, which LSU won 17–10, except that this time the defensive tyrants were cloaked in red rather than purple and gold: The Bulldogs had five sacks and forced three fumbles. "They came out fast and furious," said Tigers coach Nick Saban. "I thought we were ready to play, and the outcome was a real curveball."

Certainly this Georgia team is far different from the one that scrambled helplessly around Tiger Stadium a year ago—and in many ways from the one that scored 33 points, total, against South Carolina and Marshall in September. Quarterback David Greene, who had two of the worst performances of his career against the Tigers in 2003 (one of them in the SEC title game), threw for TDs on five of his 10 completions. His linemen, who gave up an SEC-high 47 sacks last season, allowed just one while ushering freshman backs Danny Ware and Thomas Brown to a combined 190 yards on the ground.

Meanwhile, to say that the defense *hasn't* changed much since last year, when the Bulldogs were fourth in the nation in yards allowed, is high praise. While carrying the offense through sporadic naps, the Dawgs' D has shown a big-play ability that can galvanize Greene's unit. Near the end of the first quarter against LSU, Davis plowed into Tigers tailback Justin Vincent, popping the ball free. Sophomore defensive end Quentin Moses scooped it up, and on the next possession Greene hit Gibson for a two-yard touchdown to put Georgia up 17–0. On the following series Davis wrapped up fullback Jacob Hester, and the ball squirted into the hands of linebacker Odell Thurman. Five plays later Greene connected with Reggie Brown on a 29-yard scoring strike, pushing the lead to 24. Game over.

HIT PARADE Davis, the Bulldogs' top tackler, forced two first-half fumbles, each of which set up a Georgia touchdown.

Even amid a constellation of defensive stars that includes Thurman and All-America end

coaches just looked at each other as if to say, Did you just see what I just saw?"

Before long, rival coaches were saying the same thing. In the second game of the season Peterson ran for 340 yards against Huntsville. He finished the year with 2,051 yards on 246 carries. As a senior he rushed for 2,960 yards on 252 attempts. He stood 6' 2", weighed 210 pounds and was built like Mr. Clean. He ran the 40 in 4.4. He could bowl a defender over on one play and beat him to the corner on the next. Rivals.com rated him the top player in the nation.

On a recent weekday, coaches at Palestine watched a Peterson highlight video during their lunch break. "Look at him run by them!" said offensive coordinator Tom Allison with a giggle as Peterson sliced through Cleveland High's defense. "They're like little-bitty kids!"

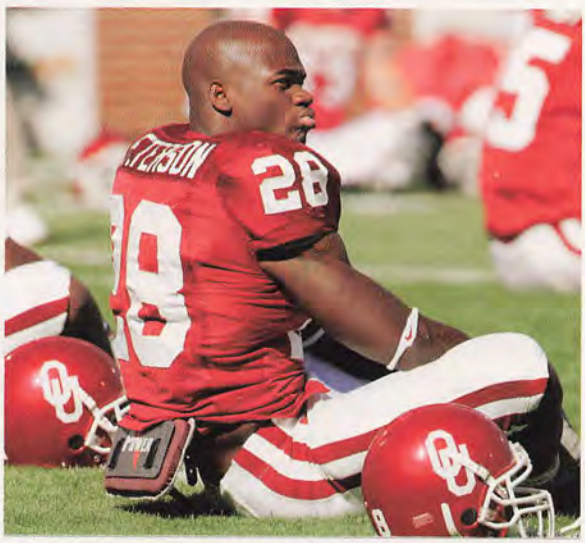
"Is this the game where he knocked that linebacker down, stepped on his chest and went 88 yards for the score?"

"This might be the game he had six touchdowns in the first half."

And so on.

Recruiters descended like locusts. Wyatt established a good rapport with Peterson, double-teaming him with running backs coach Cale Gundy. It was Gundy who got the blue chip's attention with a rather unconventional pitch: "We don't need to butter you anymore. You know how much we want you. But I'll tell you this: We've won more games in the last five years than any other school in the country, and we're gonna keep winning whether you come here or not. You can join us or be on the other side."

Stoops and Wyatt were the only coaches to visit Nelson in prison. Adrian and Nel-



BORDER JUMPER Though a Texas native, Peterson was swayed by the Sooners' personal touch—and their recent record.

SIMON BRUTY (TOP); JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

David Pollack, Davis stands out. That's ironic given the obscurity in which he spent his high school years. Turns out even when you're good enough to play running back, quarterback, defensive end, defensive back and wide receiver, if you do it at Randolph-Clay High in Shellman, Ga. (pop. 1,100), few hear about it. Only Grambling, Savannah State and Georgia offered Davis scholarships. But Bulldogs defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder needed only to see Davis outmuscle and outrun his teammates at a basketball practice (he also played forward for Randolph-Clay) to be convinced that he was Georgia material. "There was no braggadocio in him," says VanGorder, who was named the top assistant coach in the nation last year. "But he could get from A to B as quick as I've seen."

Once Davis was on campus, coaches found him to be a ferocious and technically sound tackler—traits Davis attributes to his penchant for "running over opponents instead of around them" in his tailback days at Randolph-Clay. Early on, Georgia tried to mold the brawny speedster into a linebacker, but in 2003 he was moved to safety in part to capitalize on his quickness in coverage and on blitzes. He finished the season with a team-high 130 tackles, earning the Iron Man Award as the player who "strains his potential in every endeavor." Now, "every time I have a big hit," says Davis, "I think about what those other big teams are missing out on."

VanGorder has persuaded coach Mark Richt to allow the Dawgs to practice in full pads and at full speed at least once a week. With a bye before the LSU game, Georgia had three days of such drills. "If VanGorder had his way, we'd go live every day," says Thurman. "Especially leading up to a dogfight like LSU."

After Davis had concluded his hit parade on Saturday (his eight tackles tied Thurman for the team lead) and morphed into his quiet off-field self, he exchanged knowing grins with VanGorder. "Man, that felt good," the junior said.

"It feels good for all of us," said his coach.

If the Bulldogs can keep making big plays—and next week's home game against 3–1 Tennessee will be a telling test—they should be feeling even better come December. *—Kelley King*

GREENE DAY Well-protected and mistake-free, the Georgia QB threw a school-record five touchdown passes.

son have remained close during the father's incarceration. "My dad made a mistake," Adrian says. "Just because he's [in prison] doesn't mean he's a bad person. He's a really great person. He always led me the right way, taught me to be respectful to other people."

With his father's blessing, Adrian was leaning toward the Sooners from the beginning. In spite of the full-page ad taken out by a local fan in the *Palestine Herald-Press* pleading with him to stay in-state; despite the fact that Bonita's brother Chris Smith, was a defensive end at Texas in the '90s; and even though Adrian kept a poster of Ricky Williams in his room, the Longhorns simply didn't float his boat. Texas didn't help itself by losing for four straight years to the Sooners, including last season's 65–13 debacle, which Peterson watched from the stands.

Peterson announced his decision on live television at halftime of the Army All-Star Game in San Antonio last January. Given the level of attention he had gotten, Oklahoma strength and conditioning coach Jerry Schmidt says there was a presumption among some of the older Sooners that "this guy's gonna come in here and think he's All-Everything." Peterson arrived in June to take part in Schmidt's notorious summer workouts, two-hour sessions in which the players do speed-training for one hour, then lift for another. "It's balls-out," says Schmidt. Is there some upchucking? "Oh, yeah."

Not all incoming Sooners freshmen can finish these sessions, which are brutal "even for the guys who've been in the program for a few years," says Schmidt. "But Adrian, he doesn't get tired. It's amazing." Not only did Peterson complete Schmidt's drills, he also often finished ahead of the older players. "We're out there dying," says Joseph, "and this guy is on skates or something, just leaving us behind."

"Usually when a young guy comes in, he's got to go through a . . . *procedure* with the veterans," says Long. "Here's a guy who **EARNED THEIR RESPECT** inside a month."

The Oklahoma running back to whom Peterson is most frequently compared, in terms of ability, is Marcus Dupree, the man-child from Philadelphia, Miss., who played a single season for the Sooners, in 1982, before signing with the USFL. An enormous talent with a correspondingly large appetite, Dupree went home for

BOB ROSATO

Who'll Stay Perfect?

The number of unbeatens is dropping quickly, and there will be even fewer after these four big Saturday games

NO. 2 OKLAHOMA (4-0) VS. NO. 5 TEXAS (4-0) AT DALLAS

Clayton

This could be Texas's best chance in years to beat Oklahoma, but with the Sooners stacking nine in the box against RB Cedric Benson, sophomore QB Vince Young will have to prove he can throw downfield and convert on third-and-long. Oklahoma's offense is well balanced, with sensational freshman RB Adrian Peterson and underappreciated receiver Mark Clayton (22 receptions, 320 yards). Texas has one of the best linebackers in the country in the speedy, athletic Derrick Johnson, but while the Sooners' defense may not be as star-studded as last year, it's plenty good enough to shut down the Longhorns.

PREDICTION

Oklahoma 35, Texas 24

Johnson

NO. 7 CAL (3-0) AT NO. 1 USC (4-0)

Lyman

Can the 11th-ranked Cal defense clamp down on the most explosive player in the nation? Multiple-threat sophomore Reggie Bush is averaging 212.8 all-purpose yards for the Trojans, and the Bears must find a way to limit his big plays. This game also features two top wideouts: Cal's Chase Lyman had five catches for 176 yards against Oregon State last week, and USC's Steve Smith ranks 20th in the nation with 6.3 catches per game. The Bears were the only team to beat Southern Cal in '03; this year they lead the nation in scoring (48.7 ppg) and rank second in total offense (539 ypg). Ready for another upset?

PREDICTION

Cal 38, USC 35

Smith

NO. 13 MINNESOTA (5-0) AT NO. 14 MICHIGAN (4-1)

Cupito

Unstoppable force, meet immovable object. Minnesota boasts the best one-two rushing punch in the nation in RBs Marion Barber III and Laurence Maroney, who've combined for 254.4 yards per game; Michigan has the nation's top rushing defense (a scant 47.2 yards per game). A stalemate on that front means the game could come down to the quarterbacks, where Minnesota has the edge. Golden Gophers sophomore Bryan Cupito has thrown seven TDs and just one interception. Michigan true freshman Chad Henne, while promising, has been inconsistent and could be susceptible to pressure.

PREDICTION

Minnesota 24, Michigan 20

Henne

NO. 17 TENNESSEE (3-1) AT NO. 3 GEORGIA (4-0)

Ainge

The bad news: Tennessee true freshman quarterback Erik Ainge had trouble with Auburn's pressure (four INTs) in a 34-10 loss last Saturday. The worse news: The Bulldogs' defense is much better than Auburn's. After looking sluggish at the beginning of the season, Georgia unveiled a ground attack led by freshman RB Danny Ware (95.0 rushing yards per game) and showed why it's a national championship contender in routing LSU, 45-16. Reality bit Tennessee against Auburn, and now Volunteers rookie Ainge gets to find out what life is like on the road in the nation's toughest conference.

PREDICTION

Georgia 42, Tennessee 10

Ware

Christmas break that season, then showed up at the Fiesta Bowl in less than optimal shape. Dupree ran wild against Arizona State, rushing for more than 200 yards in the first half. But he wore down and sat much of the second. The Sooners lost 32-21. "If you'd have been in shape," Barry Switzer, his irate coach, told him afterward, "you'd have rushed for 400 yards, and we'd have won the game." Similar though their styles may be—like Dupree, Peterson is a powerful inside runner with breakaway speed—AD has the superior work ethic.

"Usually a young guy comes in, he's got to go through—how to say this?—a *procedure* with the veterans," says Long. "Not hazing. But you've got to earn their respect. Usually it takes some time. Like, a year. Here's a guy who earned the respect of the veterans inside a month."

A few of those veterans had to prove themselves last Saturday. Sooner Nation was abuzz all week with the semi-scandalous news: Oklahoma's defense hadn't intercepted a pass in its first three games! How would it fare against a Texas Tech spread offense that had rung up 152 points in four games? On Saturday the Sooners picked off three passes, held Tech to a single touchdown (scored after the game had been decided) and looked sharp—signs that they're ready for next week's Red River Shootout against the undefeated Longhorns.

Peterson, likewise, looked good tuning up for his showdown with the team he spurned. He broke a 61-yard run on his third carry, a gain that wouldn't have been possible, AD took pains to point out, without a thunderous block from Clayton, the wide receiver. Two plays later Peterson basically ran through two defenders to score from a yard out.

After the game a television reporter asked Stoops to talk about what made Peterson so effective. The coach tried to oblige, pointing out how the freshman's toughness and good decisions belied his youth. But the reporter was not satisfied. What makes him so powerful? she asked.

"He's big, he's strong, he's fast, he's got great vision, he's got everything you look for," Stoops said. Another reporter tried to ask a question, but Stoops wasn't finished. "He's got a great attitude about work, and doing things the right way," he added.

His is a talent, in short, that surpasseth all understanding. □

JOSH MERWIN (CLAYTON); CALEB SIMPSON/ICON SMI (JOHNSON); TODD BIGELOW/AURORA (LYMAN); PETER READ MILLER (SMITH); JOHN BIEVER (CUPITO; HENNE); AL TIELEMANS (AINGE); BOB ROSATO (WARE)

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SI's 2004
BASEBALL AWARDS

Swinging Away

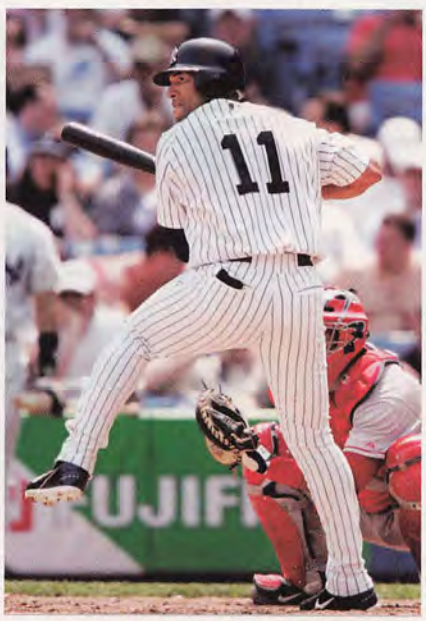
Coming off an MVP-caliber season, the well-traveled, oft-maligned yet much-admired Gary Sheffield takes his cuts at Pedro, Barry and Ichiro

BY TOM VERDUCCI

Photograph by Michael O'Neill

HE HAS an old gunshot wound in his left shoulder from thwarting an attempted car jacking in his native Tampa when he was 26; a long, jagged scar on a surgically repaired right knee that has slowly deteriorated; a separation of his left shoulder that occurred early this season and randomly stabs him with pain; and the strongest, fastest hands in baseball, with which he once pummeled a teammate so forcefully that the poor guy flew backward into his locker like a sack of dirty laundry. But on the morning of May 26, as the sun began to peek over Baltimore's Inner Harbor and into the window of his fifth-floor hotel suite, the 35-year-old tough guy felt a new kind of pain that had kept him up all night and brought him to the edge of tears—and close to quitting baseball. This time the pain was in his heart.

Gary Sheffield was tired. To be specific, he was tired of Gary Sheffield—at least that malcontent, baggage-laden Gary Sheffield whom many people still believed him to be. Five months after New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner had personally signed him as a free agent, Sheffield was hitting .265 with only three home runs in 44 games. Worse, he had heard that last off-season general manager Brian Cashman and manager Joe Torre had preferred another free-agent outfielder, Vladimir Guerrero. "Guerrero [now 28] was younger, and you heard a lot of [controversial] things about Gary," Cashman says.



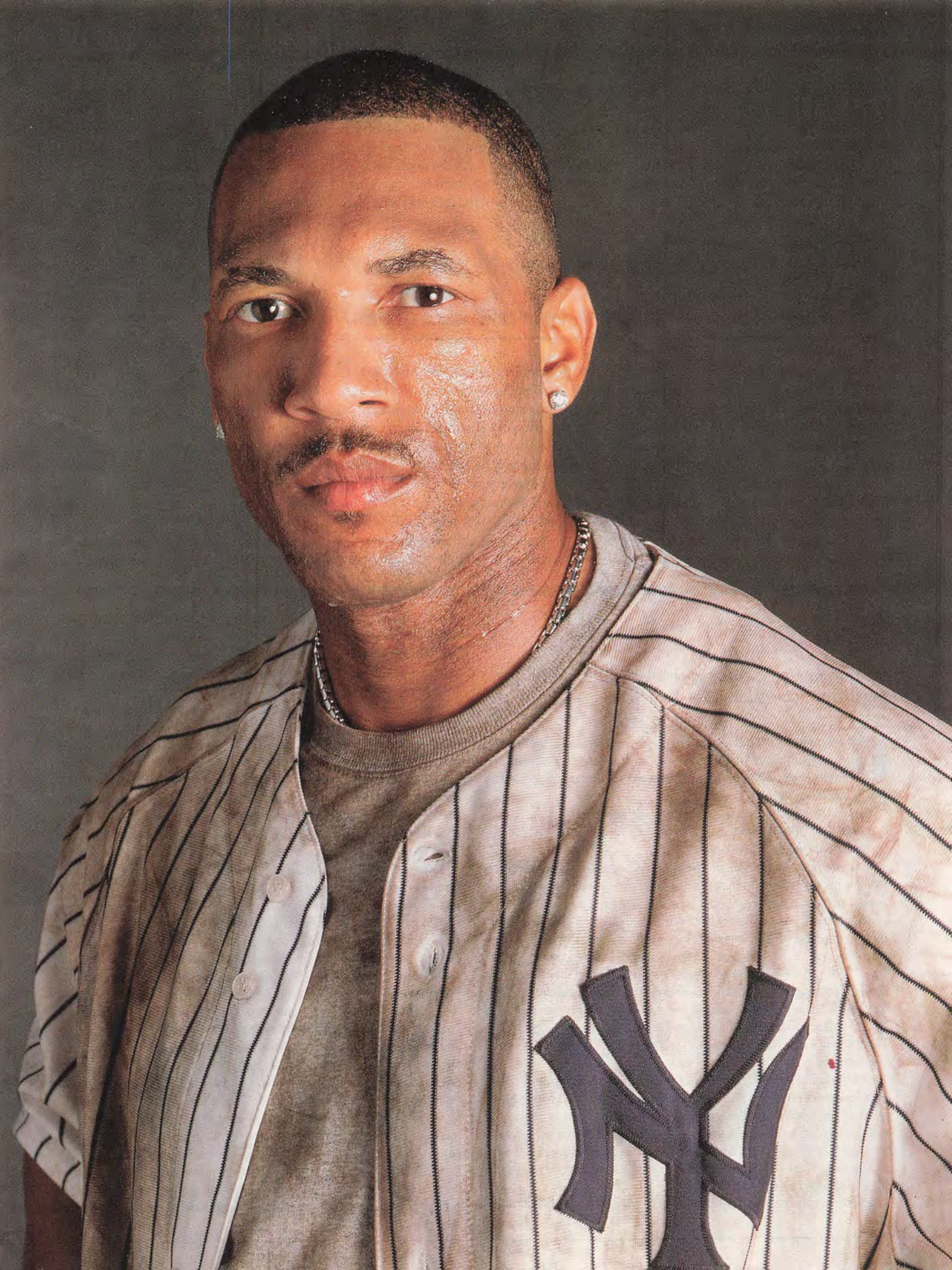
TOM DIPACE

That very kind of secondhand judgment—over 17 years and six organizations (he's made the All-Star team with five of them, the only player ever to do so)—had worn Sheffield out. A religious man since meeting gospel singer DeLeon Richards in 1997 and marrying her in '98 (they have a two-year-old son, Jaden), the tough guy prayed for help. He was tired of not hitting, tired of shadowboxing a reputation, tired of not feeling wanted. "Me and God were going at it," Sheffield says about that night in Baltimore. "I said, 'I can't keep going to work like this. I need to know if I want to play or not.' "

God gave him an answer: Think not just of yourself but about the fans and the players around you. "It isn't about you and what you're going through," Sheffield says. "It's about other people you're reaching, about when they see you producing and speaking your mind."

Sheffield decided to keep playing, but not before speaking with Torre. They met in the manager's office at Camden Yards that afternoon. Sheffield needed to hear that Torre wanted him on the Yankees, and the manager said just that.

DOUBLE CLUTCH Since May 26 the Yankees were 26–5 when Sheffield homered. "I've never seen anything like it," Rodriguez says.



When he left Torre's office, "I was a new man," Sheffield says. He called his uncle, Dwight Gooden, the former star pitcher and current Yankees adviser. "They ain't seen me [hit] yet, but I'm about to get started," Sheffield said. 'It's time to put all the women and children to bed."

SHEFFIELD ON PEDRO

"If he says one word to me, he's done. Pedro, YOUR BUDDY PASS IS OVER. If he tries anything, I will take care of him."

That night he whacked four hits and drove in six runs. The next night he ripped three more hits. It was decided, all right. Since May 26 Sheffield drove in 102 runs in 110 games with one good shoulder—and stamped himself as a leading contender for the American League Most Valuable Player award. Guerrero likely snatched the trophy with his torrid stretch run *(box, page 58)*, but Sheffield's credentials are solid. His Triple Crown category stats are impressive enough (.290, 36 homers, 121 RBIs), but he also hit .342 in the late innings of close games (seventh inning or later with the batting team either ahead by one run, tied or with the potential tying run at least on deck), including two ninth-inning home runs that rescued the Yankees from defeats. Since May 26 New York went 26–5 when its star rightfielder hit a home run and 49–38 when he didn't.

"I've never seen anything like it," teammate Alex Rodriguez says. "It's been movielike the way he comes up in big spots and delivers every time."

With a don't-mess-with-me glint in his eyes, Sheffield belongs in a Clint Eastwood role, his capacity to endure pain inspiring the Yankees and his ability to inflict pain intimidating opponents. Says one AL scout, "Sheffield is the MVP. There's no question in my mind. He is the ultimate warrior." Toronto Blue Jays G.M. J.P. Ricciardi sought out Sheffield during a batting practice session in August to tell him, "I want you to know how much I enjoy watching you play the game. You play the game as hard as anybody in baseball."

From the outset, Sheffield established himself as a commanding leader on the Yankees. When outfielder Kenny Lofton complained on the second day of the season about batting ninth, it was Sheffield who pulled him aside and told him to stuff it. "If you take on Mr. Torre," he told Lofton, "you're going to lose. And you won't just be done with the Yankees. You'll be done in baseball."

After Rodriguez struggled for much of the season with runners in scoring position, it was Sheffield who snapped him out of it in August by telling him to "stop feeling for the ball and let it fly."

And when Boston Red Sox righthander Pedro Martinez flashed his usual machismo

Severing Bonds

In a universe of limos, personal chefs and performance-enhancers, two stars clashed

GARY SHEFFIELD was testifying before a federal grand jury in San Francisco in 2003 when a prosecutor held up the testoterone-based steroid known as "the cream," supplied by the Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative.

"Do you know what this is?" Sheffield was asked.

"Yeah, I do," Sheffield said.

"What did they tell you it was for?"

"My wounds," said Sheffield, who then rolled up his right pants leg to show a surgical scar on the outside of his knee. "It was like a cortisone to heal these wounds. I rubbed it on every night and it helped me."

Sheffield says he was not told that the cream, which he used before and during the 2002 season when he played for the Atlanta Braves, was an illegal steroid. "It was like you could go to a store and find something like that. That's what was in my thoughts," he says. "I put it on my legs and thought nothing of it. I kept it in my locker. The trainer saw my cream."

Sheffield says it shocked him when news broke that "the cream" and "the clear," another balm supplied by BALCO, were designer steroids. "That's why I was mad," he says. "I want everybody to be on an even playing field."

Sheffield was introduced to BALCO by someone he now describes as a former friend: Barry Bonds. Sheffield says he has no knowledge of what, if any, enhancers Bonds may have used, but he did provide SI with a harsh firsthand look at the inner circle of Bonds's trainers. (Bonds, through a spokesperson, declined to address Sheffield's comments, saying only, "I wish nothing but the best for Gary. I want him to win the MVP. He deserves it.")

Sheffield says he and Bonds enjoyed a casual friendship when the Giants leftfielder invited Sheffield to live and train with him in San Francisco for a few weeks before the 2002 season. "He said, 'I got guys here, they can get your urine and blood and prescribe a vitamin specifically for your blood type and what your body needs,' " Sheffield says. "And that's what I did."

Bonds introduced Sheffield to BALCO president Victor Conte as well as to members of Bonds's support team, which included chiropractors, a track coach, a stretching coach and a strength coach, Greg Anderson. He and Conte were two of four men indicted last Feb. 12 on charges of conspiring to distribute performance-enhancing drugs. Sheffield says he did not deal directly with anyone from BALCO after his initial meeting with Conte, but that the company gave vitamins to Anderson, and Anderson gave them to Sheffield. (Through his lawyer, Anderson declined to comment on providing Sheffield with any BALCO products.)

"The only thing Greg Anderson does is what Barry tells him to do," Sheffield says. "Barry ran everything. If I'm training and if he sees Greg making me do one curl too many, it's an argument: 'I told you, don't have him do no more than he needs!' So I knew Greg was a puppet. All these guys around [Bonds] were puppets.

"They used to confide in me about how they hated it. I told them, 'You knew what you were getting into. You accept his money. You accept the status when you're around him. But you don't want to deal with the backlash of what comes out of his mouth, and you want to complain to me.' "

Soon after Sheffield arrived in San Francisco, the friendship between him and Bonds began to sour. Bonds insisted that Sheffield stay at his house and not rent a car. He insisted that Sheffield not pay for anything, though Sheffield did bring his personal chef. "[It was], 'It's my way or no way,' " Sheffield says. "I'm not a child. I make $11 million. I can buy what I want."

To thank Bonds for inviting him into his home, Sheffield arranged for the two of them to see a boxing match in Miami on Feb. 2, 2002. "I was going to pay for the plane, the flight, pay for the limo service, the hotel," Sheffield says. "He gets my mail. He looks in my mail and sees he can get better seats, so he gets better seats. He can get a better flight, so he gets a better flight. He can get a better limo service. And he can get a bet-

on July 1 by nailing Sheffield with a pitch after he had the temerity to ask for time as Martinez prepared to throw, Sheffield stood up to him. "You're messin' with the wrong guy," he warned Martinez, glowering as he walked to first base.

Indeed, during his tenure in Milwaukee (1988 through '91) Sheffield once flattened teammate Mark Knudson after the right-hander told writers that he didn't want the ball hit to Sheffield in the late innings. After knocking Knudson into his locker, Sheffield turned around to his teammates and said, "Anybody else got a problem?" The room fell silent.

Martinez, Sheffield says, should be aware that he's been put on similar notice. "I gave him one buddy pass," Sheffield says. "If he says one word to me, he's done. Pedro, your buddy pass is over. I've been playing for 17 years. I will never be disrespected on a baseball field or off. If he tries anything again, I won't hurt my team, but I'm telling you, I will take care of him."

No one swings a bat with more ferocity and seeming menace than Sheffield, and he wields words in a like manner. Says Sheffield, "When you hear it from me, you're going to hear it directly. I've been this way all my life. If you really don't want to know the truth, you better go to somebody else."

Ichiro Suzuki? "Two hundred singles? Come on. That doesn't make you a great hitter. If I didn't care about hitting the ball hard and hitting it out of the park, I'd hit you singles all day long. Any guy can go out there and get a single if that's all you try for. I ain't impressed."

SHEFFIELD ON ICHIRO

"Two hundred singles doesn't make you a great hitter. ANY GUY CAN get a single if that's all you try for. I ain't impressed."

CHUCK SOLOMON (MARTINEZ); KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/AP (ICHIRO)

Performance-enhancing drugs? "I know guys are not *that* much better than me naturally. There's no way possible. I'm not going to say any names, [but] six years ago I had the same number of home runs as another player, and I have had my best [home run] years since then. And you mean to tell me he outhomered me by 250? No way possible. Ain't no one in the world who can convince me that is possible."

The MVP? "If it was A-Rod [having the year I'm having], it would be unanimous. If it was someone else, it would be unanimous. But why isn't it? Because it's Gary Sheffield. And I'm supposed to be flattered [by being mentioned]? My uncle [Goodden] said, 'Man, don't say anything' or 'Do this or do that' to get it. If I have to kiss your behind to get an award, guess what? I won't win it."

Sheffield understands that such frank talk has contributed to people's wariness of him, as it did with Cashman, for instance.

ERIC RISBERG/AP

SEPARATE WAYS "I don't want friends like that," Sheffield says of Bonds, who introduced him to BALCO before the 2002 season.

ter hotel. So basically my plan, in trying to do something in return, he wound up doing it. And [that sort of behavior] just escalated."

Another time, Sheffield arranged for a limo and tickets for him and Bonds to see the Sacramento Kings host the Los Angeles Lakers. "He complained the whole drive," Sheffield says. " 'Man, I could have drove. We would have gotten there a lot faster.' The whole time. And I'm saying to myself, Never again. Never again."

Sheffield says the breaking point occurred one morning when Bonds departed for their morning workout without him, leaving Sheffield to scramble for transportation to the gym. When Sheffield eventually showed up, he found Bonds laughing at him with someone he later learned was a writer for *Men's Journal*. "He sold me out to the media," Sheffield says.

Though Sheffield says he was under doctor's orders not to run because of his knee, he did so anyway because Bonds and his trainers wanted him to. "Now all of a sudden my knee was hurting," Sheffield says. "He said something to me [about being late]. I did not respond, because if I did respond at that particular moment, I would have knocked him out. That's how I was feeling. [But] I said [to myself], No, I'm just going to walk away, and when I say walk away I mean walk away."

Sheffield flew home to Florida with his chef. The chef told him, "Gary, I want to confess something. [Bonds] made an offer to hire me: He'll get me a car, give me a place to stay and pay off my student loan."

Shortly after they returned, Sheffield says he and his chef parted ways. Sheffield says about a month later Bonds called him to inquire about why the chef was no longer working for Sheffield but made no mention of a related development: Bonds had hired him.

"That's the kind of person I found out I was dealing with," Sheffield says. "To me, I don't want friends like that. I never will have friends like that."

Soon Sheffield received a call from one of Bonds's team. According to Sheffield, Bonds had initially insisted that Sheffield not pay for anything, but now he was told to settle his tab with BALCO and others. Bonds also told Sheffield that BALCO would no longer supply him with vitamins.

"I called BALCO. 'Do I owe you anything?' " Sheffield says. " 'Well, you have a bill. . . .' I told my wife, 'You write the check.' That's how I got linked to BALCO."

Sheffield hit .307 in 2002 after training with Bonds, but with 25 home runs and 84 RBIs, it was a down year for him. "I had my worst year ever," he says. "I gave him too much credit. When you listen to another person on an everyday basis drill into you numbers, numbers, numbers, and you've never been that way, it doesn't work. I don't play for numbers. When I played to try to get numbers, I didn't get them."

Adds Sheffield, "I never wished anything bad on [Bonds]. I want him to achieve what he wants to achieve, but what I want more is that his life gets right. That he can have compassion for other people. And that's what I want the most."

—T.V.

SI's Award Picks

On senior writer Tom Verducci's ballot, Barry Bonds will win his seventh MVP and Roger Clemens his seventh Cy Young

AMERICAN LEAGUE MVP

1. **Vladimir Guerrero,** RF, *Angels*
2. **Gary Sheffield,** RF, *Yankees*
3. **Manny Ramirez,** LF, *Red Sox*
4. **David Ortiz,** DH, *Red Sox*
5. **Michael Young,** SS, *Rangers*
6. **Miguel Tejada,** SS, *Orioles*
7. **Hideki Matsui,** LF, *Yankees*
8. **Mark Teixeira,** 1B, *Rangers*
9. **Ichiro Suzuki,** RF, *Mariners*
10. **Johan Santana,** SP, *Twins*

Guerrero (.337, 39 HRs, 126 RBIs) edged Sheffield (.290, 36, 121) in the major stat categories and stole the award by carrying the Angels down the stretch (.517, six HRs, 11 RBIs as Anaheim went 6–1 to win the West).

NATIONAL LEAGUE MVP

1. **Barry Bonds,** LF, *Giants*
2. **Adrian Beltre,** 3B, *Dodgers*
3. **Albert Pujols,** 1B, *Cardinals*
4. **Scott Rolen,** 3B, *Cardinals*
5. **Lance Berkman,** RF, *Astros*
6. **J.D. Drew,** RF, *Braves*
7. **Mark Loretta,** 2B, *Padres*
8. **Jim Edmonds,** CF, *Cardinals*
9. **Todd Helton,** 1B, *Rockies*
10. **Aramis Ramirez,** 3B, *Cubs*

Bonds walked 232 times—179 more than Beltre—and still crushed 45 homers and drove in 101 runs. Bonds, who turned 40 on July 24, has never been better: He finished with a career-best 1.424 OPS.

AL CY YOUNG

1. **Johan Santana,** SP, *Twins*
2. **Curt Schilling,** SP, *Red Sox*
3. **Mariano Rivera,** RP, *Yankees*

Santana joins Randy Johnson (1997) and Frank Viola ('88) as the AL's only lefty 20-game winners with ERAs better than 2.70 since '78. Runner-up to Johnson twice, Schilling is edged by another southpaw.

NL CY YOUNG

1. **Roger Clemens,** SP, *Astros*
2. **Randy Johnson,** SP, *Diamondbacks*
3. **Ben Sheets,** SP, *Brewers*

A brutally difficult call. Clemens (18–4, 2.98 ERA, 4–0 in September) gets the nod over a more dominant but run-starved Johnson (16–14, 2.60), who got two or fewer runs in 17 of his 35 starts.

AL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

1. **Bobby Crosby,** SS, *A's*
2. **Shingo Takatsu,** RP, *White Sox*
3. **Zack Greinke,** SP, *Royals*

The only rookie to get 500 at bats, Crosby may have tired down the stretch (.187 after July 31), but he showed some good pop (34 doubles, 22 homers) and a steady glove as Miguel Tejada's replacement.

NL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

1. **Jason Bay,** LF, *Pirates*
2. **Khalil Greene,** SS, *Padres*
3. **Akinori Otsuka,** RP, *Padres*

Bay, who led all rookies in homers (26), RBIs (82) and slugging percentage (.550) even though he missed five weeks because of shoulder surgery, should be the first Pirates player to win the award (established in 1947).

AL MANAGER OF THE YEAR

1. **Buck Showalter,** *Rangers*
2. **Ron Gardenhire,** *Twins*
3. **Mike Scioscia,** *Angels*

No team that burns through 30 pitchers, including 17 tried as starters, has any business hanging in a pennant race until Game 158. But Showalter deftly handled the ever-changing staff and made sure his club played hard every night.

NL MANAGER OF THE YEAR

1. **Bobby Cox,** *Braves*
2. **Tony La Russa,** *Cardinals*
3. **Phil Garner,** *Astros*

The Braves cut payroll, did not have Greg Maddux or Tom Glavine for the first time since 1986, plucked Jaret Wright and John Thomson off the scrap heap—and Cox still turned in his best work yet.

The G.M. knew that Sheffield had played himself out of Los Angeles in 2001 by calling team chairman and CEO Bob Daly a "liar" and identifying the mistakes the Dodgers made on contracts for several of his teammates, such as the five-year, $55 million deal given to injury-prone righthander Darren Dreifort.

Cashman also had heard the well-worn story about Sheffield's throwing balls away purposely while with the Brewers to hasten a trade. (Milwaukee dealt him in 1992.) Sheffield himself started the legend that year when he told the *Los Angeles Times* that he hated Milwaukee so much that if the official scorer gave him what Sheffield thought was an undeserved error, "I'd say, 'O.K., here's a real error,' and I'd throw the next ball into the stands on purpose."

Sheffield later recanted the statement, explaining that he said it "out of frustration." Indeed, there is no documented evidence of any such willful transgression. Sheffield was charged with two errors in a game three times in Milwaukee. In none of those instances did the second error by Sheffield put the batter on second base, which would have occurred on a throw into the stands.

Now Sheffield says the story originated at Stockton of the California League in 1987, his second year of professional ball. Then a shortstop, he was charged with an error on a relay throw from outfielder Darryl Hamilton because, Sheffield claims, the official scorer wanted to protect Hamilton's errorless streak. Sheffield was so angry over the call that on his next fielding chance he tried to throw the ball as hard as he could to first base, resulting in a wayward throw. He was 18 years old at the time.

BENEATH A brilliant midday sun the undulating harbor water throws off specks of light. It's September, and Sheffield is back in the same Baltimore hotel suite in which he was so despondent four months before. The tough guy, his thick, bridge-cable arms exposed from a sleeveless T-shirt, is ironing.

Sheffield had no doubts about his standing as a Yankee now. He has even tied Joe DiMaggio's record for most home runs in a season at Yankee Stadium by a right-handed hitter (19). His teammates are drawn to him, inspired by his grit and humbled by his ability. They still talk in reverence about the home run he hit off Minnesota Twins closer Joe Nathan on Aug. 19. New York was down to its last two

JOHN IACONO (GUERRERO); TOM DAHLIN (SANTANA); CHRIS BERNACCHI/SPORTPICS (CROSBY); LARRY GOREN/ICON SMI (SHOWALTER); CHUCK SOLOMON (BONDS, COX); ROBERT BECK (CLEMENS); DON SMITH/MLB (BAY)

outs. Sheffield decided Nathan's breaking ball that night was unhittable, so he looked for something hard and away.

"You have to appreciate how much conviction that takes," Torre says. Nathan throws 97 mph. If he threw his fastball inside while Sheffield was committed to it away . . . well, that's why they have ambulances standing by.

"If you come inside you're really doing me a favor," Sheffield explains, "and do you really want to do me a favor? Do you want to deal with your teammates and your manager who know I'm an inside hitter?"

Nathan threw a 97-mph fastball low and away, out of the strike zone. Sheffield hooked it over the wall in leftfield for a game-tying homer. His teammates couldn't believe that he took a pitch that fast and that far away from him and pulled it so far. But Sheffield had been so amped for that very pitch that he thought he'd hit a 90-mph slider. "I'm able to slow things down in my brain," Sheffield says. "I don't know if you can explain that. It's a gift from God."

In August, Braves closer John Smoltz called Sheffield the one man "I feared facing more than any other righthanded hitter."

Says Rodriguez, "He can do something I've never seen anybody else do: He can sit on a breaking ball and still react to a fastball and get to it out front. He's amazing."

After 17 years and 415 home runs there is still a sense of discovery about Sheffield as the Yankees begin their quest for a fifth World Series title in nine years with a Division Series against the Twins. "He's been everything we could have hoped for and more," says Cashman. "He's a better defensive player than I thought. He's been a perfect fit."

Late at night, after road games, Sheffield and reliever Tom (Flash) Gordon, his closest friend on the team, order in food and play cards. The games last longer if one of them had a bad night at the park. One night Sheffield interrupted the card game for a moment and said, "Flash, this is the happiest year I've had in baseball."

Sheffield, the iron now upright in his hand, a black linen shirt spread out on the board, is reminded of that comment and asked if he really meant it. "Yeah," he says, "because you can't hide anything playing in New York, you can't pretend. You can't hide what kind of player you really are."

He drops his head and gets back to work, back to ironing out the wrinkles, setting things straight. □

FROM TOP: LARRY GOREN/ICON SMI; JOHN CORDES/ICON SMI; AL TIELEMANS; ELISE AMENDOLA/AP; RICH KANE/ICON SMI

The MRP Awards

There is no shortage of nominees when SI pays tribute to the year's Most Ridiculous Performances in the major leagues

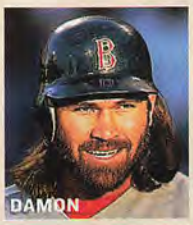
IT IS but a step, as Napoleon remarked, from the sublime to the ridiculous, so let us step boldly and present our third annual Most Ridiculous Performance (MRP) awards.

WORLD'S SMALLEST VIOLIN AWARD To White Sox designated hitter Frank Thomas, 36, who, having exercised a one-year, $6 million contract option (down from the $9.9 million he was paid in 2002), said, "After the year I had last year, it's a little disappointing come the first and 15th."

KLESKO

ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU AWARD To Padres outfielder Ryan Klesko, who missed six games after he stood up awkwardly for the national anthem and strained his right oblique muscle.

TIME STANDS STILL AWARD To then Twins first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz, who, after chubby DH Matt Lecroy pinch-ran for him in a spring training game, said, "Watching him come out there was the longest 2½ minutes of my life."


DAMON

RAMIREZ

FRANCONA

***FEAR FACTOR* AWARD** To Lecroy, who accepted $550 from teammates to eat a beetle found in the visiting clubhouse in Kansas City.

I'M NOT ONLY THE HAIR CLUB PRESIDENT . . . AWARD To Red Sox righthander Bronson Arroyo (bleach-blond cornrows), centerfielder Johnny Damon (Grizzly Adams 'do), righthander Pedro Martinez (Jheri curl) and leftfielder Manny Ramirez (horizontal Afro), owners of the majors' four most distinctive hairstyles.

. . . I'M ALSO A CLIENT AWARD To Red Sox manager Terry Francona, who is bald.

EARLY BIRD AWARD To A's righthander Rich Harden, who missed 10 days in spring training after he strained his left shoulder reaching to turn off his alarm clock.

WATER INTO WINE AWARD To 46-year-old Braves first baseman Julio Franco, explaining his longevity: "I am on the juice. The juice of Jesus of Nazareth."

CUBIC ZIRCONIA WEB GEM AWARD To Manny Ramirez, for an impossible diving catch—of a Johnny Damon throw he had no business cutting off, allowing Baltimore's David Newhan an inside-the-park home run.

TEXAS HOLD 'EM AWARD To Bartolo Colon of the Angels, who went 6–0 with a 2.14 ERA against the Rangers and 12–12, 5.74 against all other teams.

IF TODAY IS TUESDAY, THIS MUST BE CLEVELAND AWARD To the Marlins and the itinerant Expos, who played each other in four ballparks this season: Olympic Stadium in Montreal, Hiram Bithorn Stadium in San Juan, Pro Player Stadium in Miami and U.S. Cellular Field in Chicago.

SILVER TONGUE AWARD To White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen, who said of Rangers skipper Buck Showalter, "He never even smelled a jock in the big leagues [as a player]. Mr. Baseball never even got a hit in Triple A."

DUNN

BENIGN NEGLECT AWARD To Barry Bonds, who claimed that no monuments are built in honor of blacks, although a statue of his godfather, Willie Mays, stands outside San Francisco's SBC Park.

PYRRHIC VICTORY AWARD To Reds leftfielder Adam Dunn, who, after surpassing Bobby Bonds's single-season record with his 190th strikeout, said, "At least I beat a Bonds at something."

PYRRHIC VICTORY AWARD, PART II To the Devil Rays, who celebrated with a clubhouse champagne toast after clinching fourth place in the AL East, the best finish in the franchise's seven seasons.

—Daniel G. Habib

Painful Reality

A rash of **major injuries** raises the question of whether the NFL's oversized and ultrafast players have pushed their bodies beyond the breaking point

BY PETER KING

ON A PICTURE-PERFECT season-opening Sunday at Soldier Field in Chicago last month, the Bears' five captains marched to midfield for the coin toss with the Detroit Lions. Among Chicago's representatives were arguably the team's three most indispensable players: promising quarterback Rex Grossman and the two cornerstones of their solid young defense, cat-quick linebacker Brian Urlacher and punishing safety Mike Brown.

Within 14 days all three players, plus three more starters, would be sidelined with injuries, crippling the Bears' season. Brown (torn Achilles in Week 2) and Grossman (torn ACL in Week 3) were lost for the season; Urlacher, who strained a hamstring early in training camp, aggravated the injury in Week 2 and has missed the last two games for the 1–3 Bears. Even Chicago's bitter rivals were sympathetic. Pepper Burruss, the longtime Green Bay Packers trainer, called Tim Bream, his counterpart in Chicago, last week and said, "Dude, don't go standing under a tree in a lightning storm. You guys are getting wiped out."

The Bears weren't the only NFC North team ravaged by injuries. The Minnesota Vikings, who put three players on injured reserve throughout 2003, had seven on the

list after three weeks this season. Starting tight end Jim Kleinsasser (torn knee ligament) and his backup, Jermaine Wiggins (broken hand), went down in the first and second weeks, respectively. The day after Wiggins got hurt, coach Mike Tice made a call to training-camp cut Sean Berton, who was shopping in the Mall of America, and said, "Get ready. You're probably going to start next week."

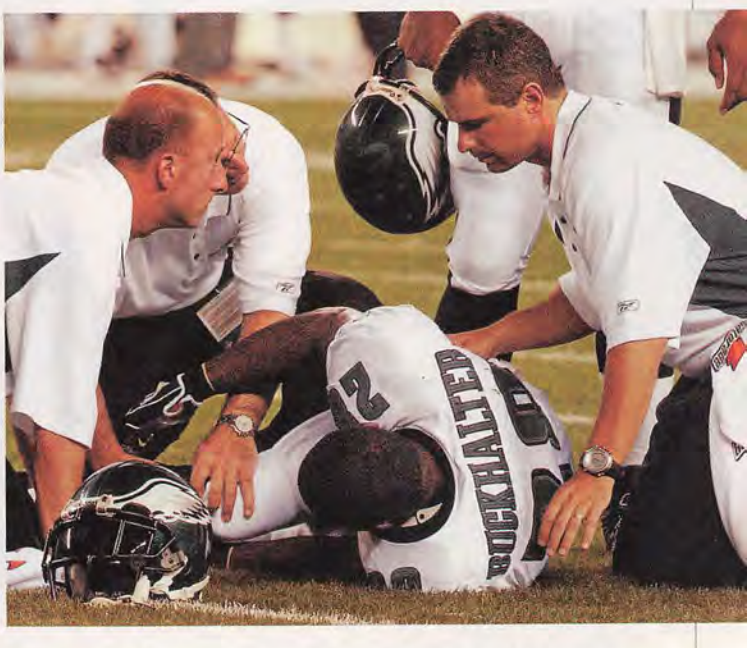
The NFL's casualty list doesn't just *seem* longer this year. It *is* longer. An executive for one team told SI that from the start of training camp through the first three weeks of the season, the number of players on injured reserve was up 39% over the average for the same period from 1998 through 2003. During that six-year window an average of 105 players were on injured reserve after the third week of the season; through three weeks this year the number was 146. Even more striking, 33 of the players on IR were starters—almost double the number (18) who were sidelined for the season after three weeks last year. The Cincinnati Bengals, who placed three players on injured reserve last year, already had shelved 10 players through Week 3. During their Sept. 19 game against the Dallas Cowboys, the Cleveland Browns lost four of their 10 highest-paid players with injuries that will keep them out for anywhere from a month to the rest of the season. Even the league's positive-spin website, NFL.com, took notice. On the morning of Sept. 28, under its NFL HEADLINES section, the first six stories were injury-related.

Maybe the rash of serious injuries was a three-week anomaly. (Analysis of Week 4 was not available when SI went to press on Monday.) "It's fluky," Carolina Panthers coach John Fox says. "By the end of the year I don't think the numbers will be very different. We've got a violent game, and these guys are human projectiles." But Atlanta Falcons general manager Rich McKay, co-chairman of the league's competition committee, said last Friday that the injury numbers "really concern me. If it continues, it would put much more emphasis on the league trying to figure out why this is happening."

Dr. Elliot Pellman, the chairman of the New York Jets' medical department and the NFL's medical liaison with the 32 teams, says, "It's gotten my attention, and the league's attention. The fundamental question is: Has something changed this year regarding the number and nature of injuries? I suspect not. But I won't know for sure until the season plays out."

Team executives, coaches, players and trainers have various theories about the increase in serious injuries, but most of them agree on one: The human projectiles have gotten too big and too fast, and the collisions too violent. If that's why so many stars have been sidelined with broken legs (Carolina wide receiver Steve Smith), torn Achilles tendons (Washington Redskins tackle Jon Jansen) and broken vertebrae (Oakland Raiders quarterback Rich Gannon), what, if anything, can the league do about it? Maybe it's time to dial down the almost year-round training, and time for the NFL to make sure that players are given sufficient opportunity to recover from a brutal season.

Of course, the signs of increased injury risk have been around for years. While football players have always been big, the rate at which they've been growing has increased sharply in recent years. Take the Pittsburgh Steelers, for example: In 1964 their starting offensive line averaged 241 pounds; that average rose to 260 pounds in '84 (an 8% increase in 20 years) and 309 pounds this year (a 19% increase in 20 years). The pattern was similar on the Pittsburgh defensive line for those same intervals: 255 pounds to 263 (3%) to 305 (16%). And though speed comparisons aren't available, coaches such as Fox agree that NFL players across the board are much faster today.



CRIPPLING BLOWS The sight of injuries to players such as (from left) Brown, Jansen, Gannon and the Eagles' Correll Burkhalter has become all too familiar for NFL teams.

When the league harvests a new crop of college players every season, what are the teams looking for? Bigger, stronger, faster players. Before the annual scouting combine, in which 300 of the top prospects are paraded in front of coaches, scouts and front-office personnel, the draft hopefuls—

(FROM LEFT) DARREN HAUCK/WIREIMAGE.COM; AARON JOSEFCZYK/REUTERS; ROBERT B. STANTON/WIREIMAGE.COM; EDWIN MAHAN/WIREIMAGE.COM

many of whom drop out of college to prepare—spend intense weeks training not for exhibitions of their football skills but for speed and weightlifting tests. "Speed is everything," says Carolina defensive end Mike Rucker, a six-year veteran. "Before the combine, it's as if guys have crossed over to track—that's how they're training. Even linemen are training for 40-yard dashes, but how many times in a game have you ever seen a lineman run 40 yards straight ahead?"

The speed work doesn't stop after the combine. For example, this year the Miami Dolphins gave their players three weeks off between the end of their off-season program and the start of training camp in late July. But newly acquired wideout David Boston didn't use that time to rest; he went to New Orleans for speed training. Then, in the second week of preseason camp, Boston tore his left patellar tendon during a noncontact drill.

guys are taking the pads off." Most receivers—and even some linebackers and pass rushers—don't wear pads on their legs, except maybe thin thigh pads.

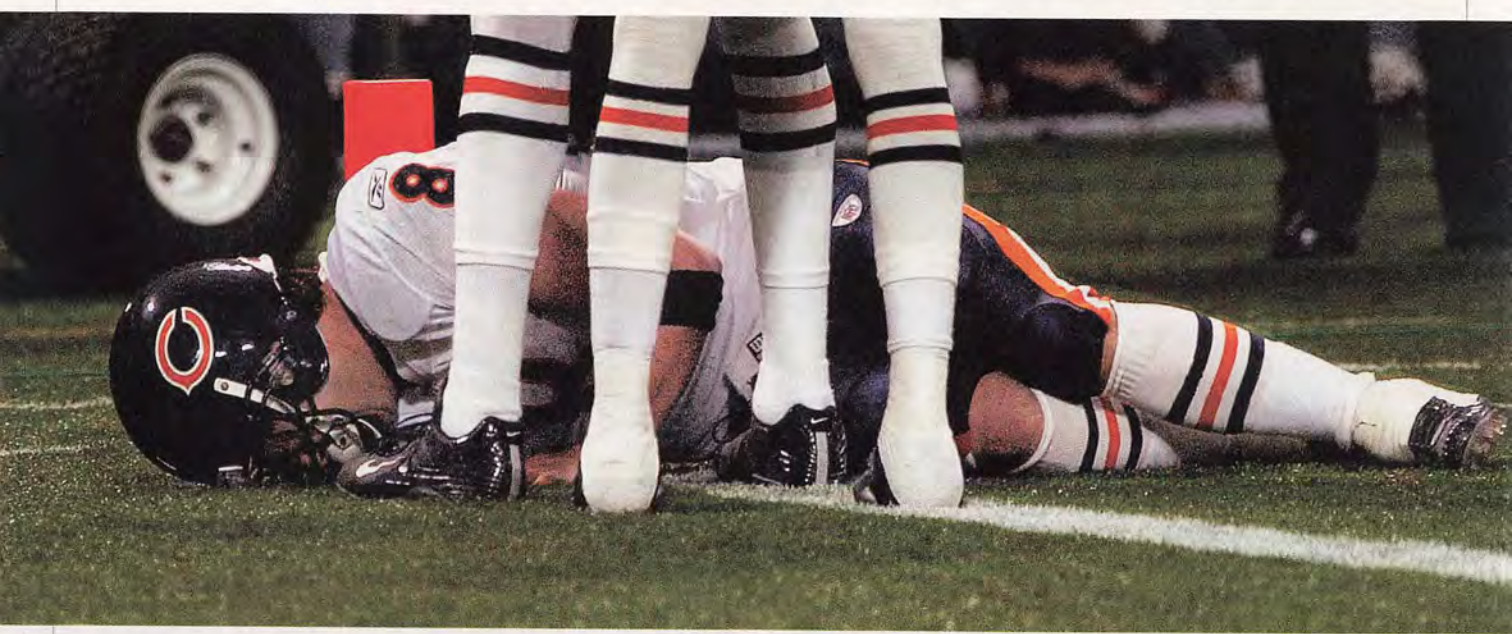
> "When I was hurt and had to watch from the sideline, I was astonished at **THE SPEED OF THE GAME**," says Lynch. "You understand why so many guys get hurt."

Then there are the shoes. "Every time I talk to [shoe companies], I tell them, 'I want them as light as possible,' " Lynch says. The Packers, among other teams, are seeing a rise in plantar fasciitis (a nagging foot injury), turf toe and arch injuries. Generally, players are left to determine the style of shoe they wear, but this summer Burruss and a team doctor vetoed the footwear of one player because they believed the track shoe was too light (about four ounces), with too little support. "Some of these shoes have almost a bedroom-slipper feel," Burruss says. "Left to their own devices, I'd say probably 10 percent of every team—five or six guys at least—would wear track shoes."

Add it up: Increased mass plus added velocity minus protection equals more dangerous collisions. The first quarter of this season may be a fluke, as Fox suggests, but it may also be a warning shot across the NFL's bow. "Last year," Lynch says, "I was hurt to the degree that I missed a few games and had to watch from the sideline. I was astonished at the speed of the game. I wondered, Am I really moving that fast? I guess I must be. You see that, and you understand why so many guys get hurt."

Recovery time, or the lack of it, might have something to do with the rash of injuries. "We go so year-round with this game that I'm not sure guys get the recovery time they need," says Dolphins trainer Kevin O'Neill. "That has to at least be a point of discussion." Much about this subject is unknown; even trainers aren't sure whether a player is better off lying on a beach for a month after the season or beginning a light training regimen soon after the games end.

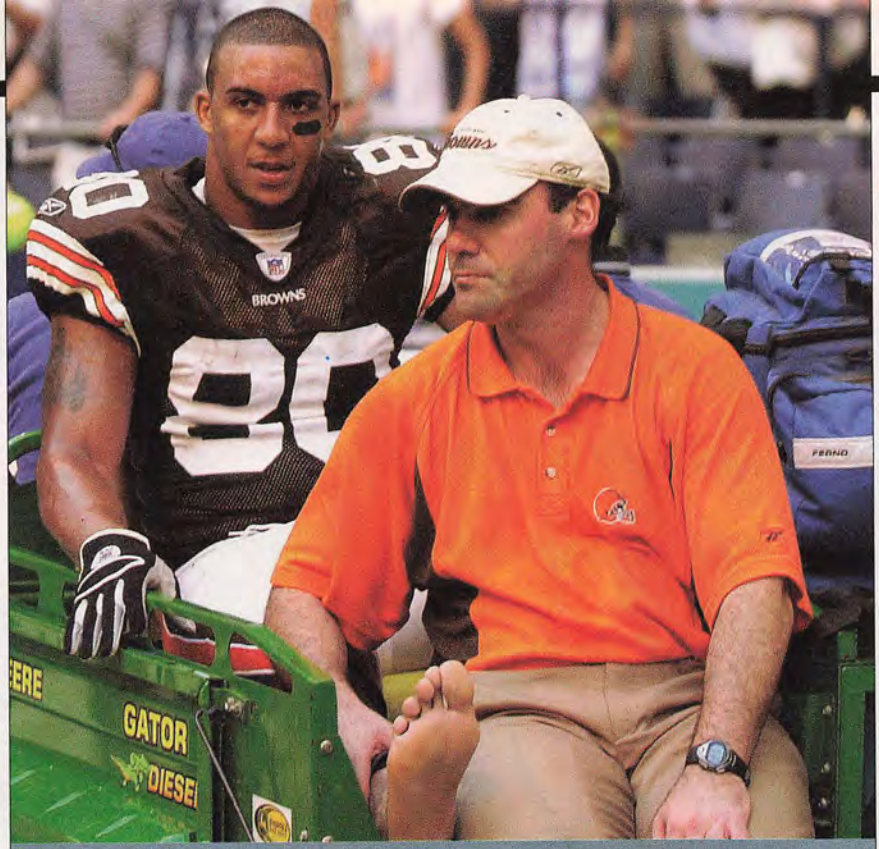
Matt Birk, the Vikings' Pro Bowl center, tries to stay in shape all year, but he's beginning to wonder if that's such a good idea. He said he took only four days off after Minnesota's season ended last December, reasoning that it's easier to stay in shape than to get into shape after slacking off. He worked out on his own for nearly three months, then participated in the team's 12-week off-season program. He had a two-week break before training camp began.



COSTLY PAY DIRT Grossman ran six yards for a touchdown against the Vikings, but the play would be his last of the 2004 season.

In the search for ways to run faster, players are wearing lighter, less protective equipment and in some cases removing gear altogether. "When I look at some of the old NFL Films footage," Denver Broncos safety John Lynch says, "the first thing I notice is how much they're wearing—big shoulder pads, hip pads, thigh pads, knee pads. Today, with coaches preaching speed,

SI.com *Peter King's Monday Morning Quarterback, every week at* **si.com/football.**



TOUGH BREAK The Browns recovered an onside kick late in a game against Dallas, but they lost prized rookie Winslow on the play.

JOHN SMIERCIAK/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/AP (GROSSMAN); TONY GUTIERREZ/AP

Nothing Hurts Worse

Among the 146 players who went on injured reserve from the start of camp through the first three weeks of the season, here are the 10 whose losses are the most damaging to their teams.

Player/Why It Hurts	Team	Pos.	Injury
1. **Kellen Winslow**	Browns	TE	Broken leg
Cleveland rewrote its short-passing playbook to utilize the talented rookie it traded up in the draft to get; now the Browns rank 30th in the league in passing			
2. **Jon Jansen**	Redskins	T	Torn Achilles tendon
Mark Brunell is running for his life because this premier right tackle was injured in Washington's preseason opener and isn't protecting the lefty passer's back			
3. **Mike Brown**	Bears	FS	Torn Achilles
After his game-turning 95-yard fumble return for a touchdown in the second quarter, the defensive playmaker went down in the fourth quarter of a Week 2 upset of Green Bay			
4. **Jim Kleinsasser**	Vikings	TE	Torn ACL
Minnesota thought so much of this 274-pounder who keys its running game that it re-signed him to a five-year, $15 million deal last March			
5. **Correll Buckhalter**	Eagles	RB	Torn patellar tendon
Philly loves to run, but the loss of this versatile back forced the coaches to use smallish, 205-pound Brian Westbook as an every-down player			
6. **Rex Grossman**	Bears	QB	Torn ACL
Desperate for a franchise quarterback, the Bears thought they had their guy in this second-year passer; now everything's on hold till '05			
7. **Kendall Simmons**	Steelers	G	Torn ACL
Pittsburgh wanted to return to a power running game, but the offense is averaging only 3.8 yards a carry without this 313-pounder leading the way			
8. **Joe Nedney**	Titans	K	Torn hamstring
On fourth-and-two with 11:33 left in a tie game against Indianapolis, Tennessee eschewed a 44-yard field goal try and failed to get a first down; the Colts capitalized and won			
9. **Charles Rogers**	Lions	WR	Broken collarbone
Dream pairing of Rogers and rookie Roy Williams blew up on Detroit's third play of the season; Rogers also broke his collarbone in '03 and missed the last 11 games			
10. **Kyle Turley**	Rams	T	Back
St. Louis not only misses his tenacity as a run blocker but also will take a $9 million salary-cap hit if Turley has to retire—as expected			

"When I showed up at camp, I found out I had a sports hernia," he says. "They said it was just the wear and tear of football."

Birk has thought about whether he's pushing his 6' 4", 308-pound body too hard in workouts, and he wonders if that was the cause of his hernia. "It might be," he says, "but you've got to work hard in this game to keep up."

One team that believes in extended periods of rest is Carolina—Fox gave his players six weeks off before training camp—and other than Smith's broken leg and running back Stephen Davis's injured knee (he had arthroscopic surgery to repair cartilage damage), the Panthers have had few injuries. "My trainer, Ryan Vermillion, was real nervous about the players being gone for so long," says Fox. "But I want them fresh for camp." New Atlanta coach Jim Mora gave his team five weeks off before camp, and only one Falcons starter, rookie cornerback DeAngelo Hall (broken hip), has suffered a major injury.

At the rate players were dropping during the first three weeks of the season, it seemed playoff berths might go to the teams that have the best 56th or 61st players. The Super Bowl–champion Patriots led the NFL in games missed because of injury last year (231), but they survived because coach Bill Belichick and personnel czar Scott Pioli come out of every training camp with not only a 53-man roster but also a dozen or more candidates who will be available to return to the team on short notice. "You better find 65 guys good enough to play, because that's probably what it's going to take," Belichick says.

With Minnesota having a bye last week, Birk was working hard not to become a statistic. Nursing a high-ankle sprain suffered against the Bears on Sept. 26, he got treatment at the team facility four times a day and alternated hot and cold compresses at home. In previous bye weeks the seven-year veteran would have spent a lot of time with his family and fished the streams around the Twin Cities. "My wife's spazzing out, but this is my job," says Birk. "There's no time to be hurt."

Try telling that to the 146 players who had landed on injured reserve by the end of September. □

Here Comes Junior

His comeback from a July crash made complete by a win at Talladega, **Dale Earnhardt Jr.** is the man to beat in the Chase for the Nextel Cup

BY LARS ANDERSON

Photographs by Jonathan Ferrey/Getty Images

THE CHARRED helmet and smoky race suit are packed in a cardboard box and stored in Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s five-bedroom house outside Mooresville, N.C., family heirlooms now. One day, maybe in 35 or 40 years, Junior figures he'll pull out that gear, which he was wearing when he crashed during a warmup for an American Le Mans Series race in Sonoma, Calif., on July 18, and tell his grandchildren the story of how he might have died in a burst of flames. ¶ "The heat got up to more than 1,000 degrees," Earnhardt recalled last Friday, as he lounged in his team's hauler at Talladega Superspeedway. "I was in the car for 14 seconds. I do feel that my dad was with me. I heard someone holler, 'Come on! Come on! Get out!' Yet nobody was there. . . . Now I've stashed away that helmet and uniform. It's time to move on."

On Sunday at Talladega—the biggest, fastest, rowdiest tri-oval in the world—Junior seized control of the Chase for the Nextel Cup, NASCAR's new playoff series. It wasn't easy, though. With five laps to go in the EA 500, Earnhardt was in 11th place. His Budweiser Chevy had been the class of the field for most of the race, but he had lost track position when he pitted on Lap 180, just moments before an accident brought out the caution flag.

When the race restarted, Junior shot through the 10 cars ahead of him, charging on the high and low lines around the 2.66-mile track. He was able to slingshot past Kevin Harvick and grab the lead with two laps left, drawing a roar from the sea of Earnhardt red–clad fans in the towering grandstands. Junior cruised to the checkered flag in a come-from-behind victory that was eerily similar to another Earnhardt win at Talladega on Oct. 15, 2000. That day Dale Sr. was trapped in 18th place with five laps to go, but he expertly rode the draft to his 76th victory—the last of his legendary career. Five months later he died in a crash on the last lap of the Daytona 500.

In the days leading up to Sunday's race, the third of the 10 that make up the Chase, most of the drivers and crew chiefs fretted about two things: Earnhardt's dominance at Talladega (four wins and two seconds in his last six starts) and the Big One (NASCARspeak for the huge pileup that commonly occurs on a superspeedway and can take out as many as two dozen cars). Even Earnhardt spoke of wanting merely to "survive" Talladega and not get caught up in a championship-jeopardizing wreck.

"There's a lot more you can lose than gain at Talladega," said Elliott Sadler, who lost plenty on Sunday, when he bumped Ward Burton's car on the last lap, spun and barrel-rolled across the finish line to finish 22nd and drop from sixth to eighth in the Chase standings. "I think the Chase actually starts after [this race]. Now you kind of know who is a contender and who isn't."

PULLIN' AHEAD With his victory, Earnhardt knocked four-time champion Gordon (24) out of the lead in the championship series.

There was no Big One, but the championship picture did, indeed, begin to come into focus. Wave goodbye to the title hopes of Jeremy Mayfield, who finished 38th and is buried in 10th place in the Chase. Jimmie Johnson has a big hole to dig out of after a failed engine caused him to finish 37th and drop to ninth in points. As it stands, four drivers—Earnhardt, Kurt Busch (who trails Earnhardt by 13 points), four-time Cup champ Jeff Gordon (61 points behind) and Mark Martin (111)—have separated themselves from the rest of the Chase lineup. The one to beat, however, is Junior. (Though his use of a four-letter word during an exuberant postrace interview with NBC could cost him a 25-point penalty; NASCAR was expected to rule on the incident on Tuesday.) He has finished in the top three in three of his last four races and appears to have regained the get-the-hell-out-of-my-way determination that he lost after the crash in Sonoma.

"You lose your edge after a serious accident," says three-time Cup champion Darrell Waltrip. "Every time you have a close call, you'll get a flashback. But the younger you are, the easier it is to come back."

It has been an arduous road back for Earnhardt, who turns 30 on Sunday. For the first month after the accident the second-degree burns on his legs made it a struggle for him to walk. (He also suffered second-degree burns on his neck.) Junior spent up to 12 hours a day lying on his living room couch with his feet elevated. His mother, Brenda Jackson, moved into his house and doted on him, serving him tomato soup, changing his bandages three times a day and helping him hobble to the bathtub to soak his tender skin.

He felt well enough to climb into his Chevy for the Siemens 300 in Loudon, N.H., on July 25, but lasted only 61 laps before the pain forced him to give way to a backup driver. The next week at Pocono, Junior completed 53 laps. His season appeared to be on the verge of collapse. But as his body healed, his performance improved. He won the Sharpie 500 at Bristol on Aug. 28, and since then Earnhardt and the Bud boys have been NASCAR's hottest team.

On Sunday, after parking in Victory Lane, Junior popped out of his window and pumped his fists for the crowd of 150,000. Talladega has long been considered the heart of NASCAR Nation, and the thunderous reaction to his victory reaffirmed his status as the sport's most popular driver. Why is Earnhardt so adored? He inherited his father's enormous fan base, of course, but he also walks the fine line between the old and new NASCAR legions more adroitly than any other driver. The older fans who followed Richard Petty and Cale Yarborough in the '60s and '70s admire Junior for being a blue-jeans-wearing good ol' boy who was raised as a hard-charging racer. Younger fans are drawn to Earnhardt because he's hip, wears his cap backward, and is personable and charming, as he showed in a *60 Minutes* interview last week.

"It's gotten so crazy that I can't walk around the infield at Talladega without causing an uproar," he said last Friday. "But I like this place. It's been good to me."

With seven races left Earnhardt is in a place that seemed unthinkable just two months ago: the Chase driver's seat. □

A UNIQUE ANGLE Blevins, who has worked with kickers since he was in high school, can improve a pupil's performance with just a few observations.

It's All in His Mind

Despite cerebral palsy, **Doug Blevins** has made himself into one of the most astute kicking coaches in the game

BY KARL TARO GREENFELD

Photograph by Walter P. Calahan

MAMA ALWAYS tells her son he can be whatever he wants to be—as all mamas do—but in Doug Blevins's case it's probably a lie. She's watching him through the kitchen window, orange Nerf football jammed between his wooden crutch and his right arm after he takes a handoff from Jimmy Lowe. The neighborhood kids are playing tackle football, and they aren't taking it easy on her handicapped son. She's already had to rush him to the hospital after his kneecap was shattered by a rough tackle. Still, Mama can't tell her boy that the words on those inspirational signs she buys at the drugstore, those little plaques reading GO FOR IT and REACH FOR THE STARS, are just platitudes—that a short, scrawny boy with cerebral palsy, well, he can dream of a lot, but he shouldn't dream of a career in professional football.

When Doug was three, in 1966, he caught a stomach virus and was hospitalized with dehydration. He was a tiny boy, weighing just 20 pounds, and Mama—Linda Blevins—carried him everywhere. The pediatrician who treated Doug took Linda aside and told her, This boy is smart. Most kids with cerebral palsy are brain-damaged and suffer from speech impediments. "Not this boy," he said. "You've got to make sure he gets his chance."

Mama always knew that her boy was bright, and she fought for his chances. When Abingdon (Va.) Elementary School officials told her that Doug was welcome to attend special education but not mainstream classes, she protested that Doug was not retarded. "Well," a member of the school board suggested when the buck was passed to him, "how about we send a teacher to your house three days a week?"

No, Mama told him, what Doug needs is school. He needs other kids. He's a real bright boy, she would shout, and he can be anything he wants to be.

Mama, a skinny woman with big hair, got her way. Doug went to school. And she never told anyone her doubts about the one thing Doug really wanted to be. Because he decided when he was four years old that he was going to have a career in pro football. Mama said he could be anything, right? Doug never needed much sleep, and he stayed awake until the end of the Monday-night game, tucked under a light blanket in his wheelchair, his head listing to the right as it does when he is rapt. When his beloved Dallas Cowboys lost a big game, he would cry, whether he was five years old or 10, and his daddy, Willis Blevins, would say, "Son, it's just a game."

And Doug would think, No, Dad, no. It's not just a game. Football was the one place a kid in a wheelchair was never, ever supposed to go. That field was reserved for the strong, the powerful, the healthy—for men who were nothing like Doug. But Mama said he could be anything he wanted. If he

AMY SANCETTA/AP

STAR PUPIL Thanks to Blevins, Vinatieri went on to kick for the Patriots and nail the Super Bowl–winning field goal in '02 (above).

Blevins' Eleven

Besides the New England Patriots' Adam Vinatieri, the 11 active NFL punters and kickers pictured at right have benefited from the expert tutelage of Doug Blevins.

Kyle Richardson, Bengals

Matt Turk, Dolphins

Josh Miller, Patriots

Chris Hanson, Jaguars

Darren Bennett, Vikings

could make it in football, Doug knew, he would have transcended his handicap.

After his parents went to bed, he would sit in his room, in the cone of light cast by a helmet-shaped lamp, surrounded by real football helmets and team pictures and signed photos, and he would write letters. To presidents, CEOs and, of course, football coaches and players. Ronald Reagan, Tom Landry, Roger Staubach. He would explain who he was and ask them questions. And they would answer. How could they not? They would tell him about their lives or the game and wish him well and send him a signed photo. Those late nights he was working his way toward something, refining his interest in the game. He realized, after sending letters to Landry and Cowboys kicking coach Bob Agajanian with some questions about kicking, that no one seemed to know—or care—very much about the subject. And when Agajanian answered and the two began a regular correspondence, Doug realized that here it was. A way into the NFL. Kicking.

"I remember watching kickers tie their toes up on the sidelines," Blevins says, recalling the practice that ensured a square toe in the days before soccer-style kicking. "It was medieval. I was thinking there had to be a better way. And I knew, since I would never play a down, that I had to develop a specialty and become the best in the world at it to even have a shot."

He was in high school when he began working with kickers. He sent away for every tape and instructional manual, watched video of every NFL kicker. There were similarities in the techniques of successful kickers: Morten Andersen, Efren Herrera, Jan Stenerud. Each repeated the same motions. He measured his steps precisely, planted his foot in the same place before every kick and squared his body to the end zone. Each had a leg that was not only powerful but also fast. Blevins watched the tapes and made notes and compared the NFL kickers with those he was seeing in high school and college games, and in all of the amateur kickers he noticed flaws, inconsistencies, tiny imperfections that resulted in wide lefts or wide rights or short kicks.

"There hasn't been a great deal of thinking about kicking," Blevins observes. "The special teams coach is in charge of kickers, and he's almost never been a kicker."

Blevins put his theories into practice working with kickers as a student assistant at Abingdon High. In his senior year he won Abingdon's Ray Petty Memorial Award, a scholarship usually given to a player. In 1983 Blevins matriculated at Tennessee, where he worked with the football team as an administrative assistant. Pretty soon the parents of kickers at nearby high schools were paying the kid in the wheelchair $25 to $40 an hour to work with their prodigies. As for the Vols coaches, he says, "They had me doing all the s---work, filing, grading film. It was like, Here's the cripple, give him stuff to do."

> Football was the one place a kid in a wheelchair was **NEVER, EVER SUPPOSED TO GO**. The field was reserved for men who were nothing like Doug.

Blevins transferred to East Tennessee State in 1986 to serve as its student kicking coach. After graduating two years later, he formed his own kicking consulting company. Later he was hired as an assistant football coach at both Abingdon High and Southwest Virginia Community College in Richlands. At night he was back in his bedroom at home, staying up until 3 a.m., sending out letters and résumés to NFL general managers, reviewing tapes, grading every kicker in the league.

An administrator at the community college knew Dick Steinberg, the New York Jets' G.M., and told him about Blevins. Steinberg said, "He can't walk, how the hell do you expect him to coach?" But he called Blevins and listened to this self-described "geeked-out cripple" talk football for two hours.

"Then," Blevins says, "this cripple sent in a fax report after every Jets game analyzing what the kickers were doing wrong." The next season the Jets took Blevins on as a kicking consultant. "The happiest moment of my life," he recalls. His reward for finally making it to the NFL: about $10,000 a year.

"This is an uphill battle," Blevins says. "It's hard enough if you're not an ex-player. But if you're a cripple? Forget it. I needed to have walking, talking résumés out there. If I had guys I found who became successful kickers in the NFL, then I'd always have a place in this league. I needed to develop an All-Pro kicker."

THE GRADUATE, a kicker and punter who had hoped to get invited to an NFL camp when he finished at South Dakota State in 1995, was back in the bedroom he grew up in, staring at his old soccer trophies. Every morning he loaded bundles of *The Rapid City Journal* onto trucks before changing into his swimsuit and climbing the high chair to lifeguard at a public pool.

One afternoon his college coach called and told him that Brian Hansen, then the Jets' punter, would be working out at a high school just across the state line in Minnesota. The graduate drove there in his 1988 Nissan pickup and punted with Hansen for an hour. "He was so much more consistent than me," the graduate says. "My

FROM FAR LEFT: THOMAS E. WITTE/ICON SMI; RICHARD C. LEWIS/WIREIMAGE.COM; THOMAS CROKE/WIREIMAGE.COM; BILL VAUGHAN/ICON SMI; TOM DAHLIN/WIREIMAGE.COM; JIM TURNER/WIREIMAGE.COM; AMY SANCETTA/AP; ALLEN KEE/WIREIMAGE.COM; DONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES; STEPHEN DUNN/GETTY IMAGES; TOM DAHLIN WIREIMAGE.COM

David Akers, Eagles

Joe Nedney, Titans

Olindo Mare, Dolphins

Shayne Graham, Bengals

Kris Brown, Texans

Aaron Elling, Vikings

best ball and his best ball were about equal, but then I'd hit a s----y one, and he'd crush another one. His were money every time."

The graduate wondered aloud about how to achieve that sort of consistency. "Call this guy," Hansen said, handing him Doug Blevins's business card.

The graduate sent Blevins a tape of himself punting and kicking in college and was told he had a good leg but needed to work on a few things. "How soon can you get here?" Blevins asked him.

"Give me two days," the graduate replied.

When Adam Vinatieri got off the plane at Tri-Cities Regional Airport outside Blountville, Tenn., there in the arrivals lounge was this tiny dude with a drooping right eye and a gnarled left hand that was bent in at the wrist like a field-hockey stick. "I thought someone was making a big joke," Vinatieri recalls. "Here is this handicapped guy being wheeled around by his wife. I'm like, Seriously, where's Blevins at?"

CHRIS USHER/APIX

SUPPORT TEAM Linda (in pink) and Nancy have Doug's back as he pursues goals that would daunt a less determined man.

But in the minivan on the way to Abingdon, as Blevins described the areas they needed to work on—Number 1: Make sure you are square with the goal line every time you kick, dammit—Vinatieri felt he had come to the right place. No one had ever talked to him this knowledgeably about kicking. "Doug has the perfect kick in his mind," Vinatieri says. "*Your* perfect kick. He's never kicked a football, so he doesn't have this idea that there is only one way to do things. He watches you and figures out what you need to do."

Vinatieri rented a tiny apartment in Abingdon and took successive jobs driving a taxi, waiting tables and tending bar. That winter and spring he kicked four days a week with Blevins and headed over to Mama's house for Sunday dinner. "We ate, slept and drank football," Vinatieri recalls. "We were like two kids on the outside looking in."

Blevins quickly turned Vinatieri from an average college kicker into a very good college kicker. By the end of the winter Vinatieri had become one of the most consistent kickers Blevins had ever worked with. "The ball was exploding off his foot," Blevins recalls. He had become a consultant for NFL Europe and needed a kicker for the video he would show to the converted soccer players the league was flying over to Atlanta for training camp. He used Vinatieri to demonstrate the proper techniques for field goals, kickoffs and punts. Pretty soon NFL Europe G.M.s were asking Blevins, What about the kid in the video, can we sign him? Vinatieri joined the Amsterdam Admirals in the spring of 1996 and was in the New England Patriots' camp that summer. Two Super Bowl–winning field goals later, Vinatieri says of Doug Blevins, "I wouldn't be here without him."

Blevins has since helped eight other kickers and punters make the NFL, and he's worked with another 13 who were already in the league. That's almost two dozen walking, talking résumés.

THERE IS no handicapped sticker on Blevins's minivan. He refuses to park in spaces for the disabled. And if you feel sorry for him, he has this to say to you: Piss off. His relentlessly positive attitude seems willfully unrealistic. When he has been fired from coaching jobs (as when the entire Jets staff was dismissed after the '94 season) or passed over by NFL teams, he has insisted on seeing the rejection as an opportunity. Mama says that's just how Doug is. "Everything has been twice as hard for him," says Linda, who divorced Doug's father in 1975. "That's really irritated me. But he just doesn't let it bother him—or he doesn't let it show."

Blevins says his affliction is the "Cadillac of handicaps," in that it's not progressive or life-threatening or completely disabling. His tireless optimism enables him to keep his dignity when he has to hold his bladder on airplane flights; when he needs assistance climbing in and out of the shower; when he needs help wiping himself at the toilet.

"The hardest thing about being physically handicapped," he says, "is that women don't find me sexually attractive." Fortunately, he will tell you, they are drawn by his blustery confidence. "Men are shallow," he says, "but women aren't, thank God."

Blevins has been married twice: first to Nenita Colon, with whom he has a six-year-old son, Roman, and now to Nancy Duque, 42. Doug and Nancy just had their first child, Sarah Elizabeth. Both of Doug's children are healthy. The only time his mood darkens is when he is asked about Roman, over whom he and his ex-wife are fighting a custody battle. "That's hard," he admits. "That's a tough deal there."

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He does get hurt, insists the Colombian-born Nancy, but he will never admit it. "He has been punished," Nancy says. "People only see him as handicapped. They don't see the professional in him, the man in him."

Doug is quick to dismiss pity: "We live in the entitlement age. I'm entitled to this, to that. F--- that. I get what I get because I can do [the job], not because it's given to me."

> If you feel sorry for Blevins, he has this to say to you: Piss off. "Everything has been **TWICE AS HARD** for him," Linda says, "but he doesn't let it bother him."

AT THE Vikings' training camp in Mankato, Minn., the players in their pads and cleats click across Stadium Road from the locker room to the Minnesota State practice fields. Daunte Culpepper, Randy Moss and Chris Hovan all represent ideals of the human form. Then here comes Blevins, buzzing along in his electric wheelchair, a baseball cap perched on his head, which lists as he pushes the joystick forward with his good hand. Blevins is hoping to win a job with the Vikings as an assistant special teams coach. After six seasons with the Miami Dolphins as a kicking coach at $25,000 per year, his contract was not renewed last year, in part because, Blevins says, the team wanted him to choose between coaching and running his own consulting business. "I had to support my family," he says.

The Vikings' kickers and punters are gathered on one of the practice fields. As kicker Aaron Elling, a longtime Blevins client, sets up for 30-, 40- and finally 50-yarders, Blevins wheels back and forth, making semicircles behind the kicker, imparting advice in his raspy Southern drawl. Elling is hooking a tiny bit. Blevins tells him to shorten his first step about six inches.

"He just sees things," says Elling. "Ten minutes and he'll improve your kicking."

Vikings coach Mike Tice agrees: "I've never seen anyone that knowledgeable about kicking."

BLEVINS REMAINS an insomniac. Nancy complains that when he finally wants to go to bed, at four or five in the morning, he gets her up to help him take a shower. Now, however, Doug's nocturnal habits have an unexpected benefit. He can respond if the baby wakes, and Nancy can get a few more hours of sleep.

Until Sarah Elizabeth stirs, Doug sits in his office, watching videotape. The Vikings didn't offer him a full-time job, but he still hopes to coach in the NFL.

He admits to just one regret: "I will never know what it's like to play football, to go out there when you're hurt and it's fourth down and it's cold and raining and you've got blood dripping down your face. I'll never know what it's like to be in the huddle and suffering and a little scared but mostly fired up and wanting it so bad that it's killing your insides. I'll never know how that feels."

You already do, Doug. You know exactly how that feels. □

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5 OUTS AWAY

A year ago the Cubs and Red Sox each came *that* close to the World Series, only to see it all blow up in eerily similar—and all-too-familiar—fashion

BY TOM VERDUCCI

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JEFFREY SMITH

NO MAS
Martinez thought he was done after the seventh, but Little had other ideas.

IN THE CAVITY OF THE CATHEDRAL, HISTORY SOUNDS LIKE a freight train rumbling through a concrete tunnel. Roger Clemens recognized the rumble. Clemens, his retirement plans not yet amended, had spent the last seven innings of Game 7 of the 2003 American League Championship Series in the home clubhouse at Yankee Stadium, nervously wondering if his career and the New York Yankees' season were about to be extinguished by the Boston Red Sox. It was 12:16 a.m. on Oct. 17 when he heard the answer from above. ■ The clubhouse is carved out among the catacombs and narrow hallways beneath the first base stands. When a moment of excitement—such as the solid thwack of a Louisville Slugger upon a benign knuckleball—brings the fans to their feet, the clatter of thousands of blue plastic seat bottoms snapping upright reverberates through the clubhouse below. ■ The noise sent Clemens to his feet and then to the door and finally toward the ramp to the field as the pennant-winning home run by Aaron Boone was floating into the leftfield seats.

"I knew that sound," Clemens would later say.

This kind of history sounded familiar. The home run ensured that Boston's 1918 World Series championship would remain its most recent, a streak of futility so long and chockfull of so many absurd near misses that it feels organic, as immutable as a law of nature. Boston is 0 for 85 since Babe Ruth pitched them to the '18 title, including four seasons that ended with defeats in Game 7 of the World Series.

Red Sox seasons die the deaths of spaghetti western cowboys: never graceful, but rather writhing, painful and melodramatic. This ending, at the hands of Boone and the Yankees, was true to form. Five outs from the World Series with a three-run lead, no one on base and their best starting pitcher on the mound, the Red Sox lost the lead without ever using their bullpen. Nobody but the Sox could lose a game so spectacularly.

Nobody, that is, except the Chicago Cubs, Boston's fraternal twin in despair.

The Cubs' institutional losing dates to 1908, when they last won the World Series. After that they are 0 for 96. Since 1945 they have played six games in which a victory would have sent them to the Series—and lost all of them. That agony includes the preposterous Game 6 of the 2003 National League Championship Series against the Florida Marlins. Like the Red Sox, the Cubs were five outs away from the World Series with a three-run lead, no one on base and their best starting pitcher on the mound.

There have been 1,077 postseason games played in the history of baseball. In only 13 of them did a team lose after it led by at least three runs with no more than five outs to go. But only twice did the losing team blow a lead that big and that late while leaving its starting pitcher in the game: the Cubs in Game 6 with Mark Prior and, two nights later, the Red Sox in Game 7 with Pedro Martinez. Two losses with matching DNA. Two out of 1,077. A .2% match. Crazy.

How the Cubs and the Red Sox invented a new way to lose within 48 hours last October is, prosaically, the story of how fatigue rendered each team's ace incapable of holding a lead. Revisiting the two games with the principal figures involved also reveals that this is a story of how baseball can take on religious properties, when belief in the unseen is as good an explanation as any.

MARK PRIOR threw a 94-mph fastball with his 99th pitch, and Marlins pinch hitter Mike Mordecai lifted it into leftfield, where it settled into Moises Alou's glove. Five outs to go.

Cubs president and CEO Andy MacPhail, sitting in a mezzanine box, began rehearsing in his head what he would say to the national television audience upon being presented with the NL championship trophy. He reminded himself that he would need to find his tie in order to look proper for such a moment.

Prior, the Cubs' ace righthander, had retired eight straight hitters while working on a three-hit shutout. Chicago led 3–0.

Waveland Avenue felt like Times Square on New Year's Eve, though a crowd waiting for a ball to drop would prove to be a cruelly prophetic image. About 3,000 people packed shoulder to shoulder in the autumnal chill on the famous street that runs parallel to the leftfield wall at Wrigley Field, the little jewelry box of a ballpark that was itself quaking with excitement. The Cubs were going to the World Series, something no one under the age of 58 had ever witnessed, including Hillary Clinton, who once said, "Being a Cubs fan prepares you for life—and Washington."

Chicago police had decided before the game that the Wrigleyville streets would be given over to 90 minutes of pure celebration immediately after the game, as long as there were—hey, hey—no open containers. The crowd was ready. Everyone thought Prior looked great. Everyone thought Prior looked strong.

Everyone, that is, except Prior.

"Most times when I pitch," he says, "I feel like in the second, third, fourth innings I'm just getting warmed up. If things go according to plan, I get a little boost after that in the middle innings, and I feel stronger at the end of the game.

"This time I didn't feel that. I felt like I had the same energy level the whole time. I never got that second wind."

FOUL PLAY

Bartman's reach for the ball was natural, but it would change the Cubs' fate—and his life—forever.

Prior, then 23, was drafted by the Cubs out of USC in 2001 and won 18 games for Chicago last season. This night, however, would be his official Cubs baptism.

The Cubs are a Franciscan franchise. For core virtues they embrace humility (they welcome opponents to "the friendly confines" of Wrigley), poverty (as it relates to winning) and love of nature (especially sunshine, grass, ivy and choice hops and barley). The Cubs may not have invented the concept of lovable losers, but they certainly have perfected it.

"I was excited to be drafted by the Cubs," Prior says. "But I got called up in a year we lost 95 games, and you start hearing all the time about the negatives. It gets drilled into you. Even while we were winning last year, people were bringing up 1908 or 1984 or 1969 over and over again. It wears on you."

The Cubs' first-year manager, Dusty Baker, had left a successful 10-year run in San Francisco to change the culture in Chicago. He was the embodiment of cool, grooving to Coltrane or Miles Davis in his tiny office while munching on a toothpick and speaking a language of optimism that sounded Greek to the Windy City. Winning baseball seasons in Chicago were treated like mild winters, totally unexpected flukes that surely meant hell to pay the next year.

"It was probably my most difficult year managing," Baker says. "Toward the end of the year I was psychologically worn out. I thought at the end of the year we were pretty close to getting the mind-set turned around."

Pretty close. Five outs from the World Series, and one strike away from whiffing centerfielder Juan Pierre, Prior fired a 96-mph fastball. Pierre swatted the pitch hard, just inside the leftfield line, for a double. Alou fielded the ball in foul ground, near the brick wall of the stands. A few feet away, in the front row of those stands, a 26-year-old man raised in the religion of the Cubs—in his lifetime the team had accrued only seven winning seasons, none consecutively—wished hard for those five outs.

The man looked like a *Sibley Guide* version of a Cubs fan, if the bird experts ever expanded their artistry into the domain of sports spectators. Well, he looked the part without the beer cup, anyway. Bespectacled, he wore a Cubs cap with earphones atop it, listening to the broadcast of the game. Over a green turtleneck he wore a black sweatshirt emblazoned with RENEGADES, the name of the youth baseball team he helped coach. He was unaware that the quiet life he knew was about to end.

The crowd was ready. Everyone thought Prior looked great. Everyone THOUGHT PRIOR LOOKED STRONG. EVERYONE, THAT IS, EXCEPT PRIOR.

MARTINEZ THREW a 93-mph fastball with his 107th pitch, and Yankees first baseman Nick Johnson lifted it to shortstop, where it settled into Nomar Garciaparra's glove. Five outs to go.

The Red Sox held a 5–2 lead. Martinez was still throwing hard. He knew, however, that the radar gun was an inadequate indicator of how he was feeling.

"Even when I'm fatigued, I can still throw hard," he says. "My arm speed may be there, but location is where I suffer, and that's because my arm angle drops. I throw three quarters, yes, but it's three-quarters steady. If I start to get tired, my arm drops a little more, and that causes the ball to stay flat over the plate. My velocity doesn't change, but I can't spot the ball as well when I'm tired. That's what happened."

Martinez had not slept well on the eve of Game 7. He was anxious, sure, but his body clock was off: He'd flown from Boston to Tampa (where the Red Sox had ended the regular season) to Oakland (where they had opened the playoffs) to Boston to Oakland to New York to Boston to New York in the previous 20 days.

The fallout from Game 3 had also taken its toll on Martinez. That epic, six days earlier at Fenway Park, had been the sizzling prelude to Game 7. New York had knocked Martinez around for four runs on six hits before the righthander was even out of the fourth inning. So emboldened were the Yankees by the hard swings they took at Martinez that they yelled at him from the dugout, "You've got nothing!"

The fourth inning of Game 3 began with a walk to Jorge Posada, followed by a single by Johnson and a double by Hideki Matsui. Martinez, working with a base open, had seen enough. With his next pitch he whistled a fastball behind the head of Karim Garcia. The pitch hit a stunned Garcia in the back.

"I don't think Pedro was trying to hurt him," says John Burkett, a Red Sox righthander since retired. "He was trying to send a message. It was, F--- this, I've got to put a scare into somebody. And he did." (Martinez claimed the pitch simply got away.)

In the bottom of the fourth inning that day, Red Sox leftfielder Manny Ramirez caused both benches to empty when, bat in hand, he glowered at Clemens after a pitch that was nowhere close to hitting him. Don Zimmer, the portly 72-year-old Yankees bench coach, charged across the field at Martinez.

"He reached for my right arm," Martinez says. "I thought, Is he going to pull it? Is he trying to hurt me? I tossed him down."

Zimmer fell awkwardly to the ground in front of the Red Sox dugout. He would apologize through tears the next day for his actions, but that did not stop New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg from suggesting that Martinez would be arrested if he had acted that way in New York.

So it should have come as no surprise when, ahead 4–1 after a rather easy sixth inning in Game 7, Martinez sat next to assistant trainer Chris Correnti and said, "Chris, I'm a little fatigued."

The Red Sox are a Calvinistic franchise. Fathers have passed to their sons, who have passed to *their* sons, a doctrine of predestination. Only by the grace of God, and not by a wicked starting rotation, can the Red Sox ever win a World Series again. The Calvinists' God, however, also marks certain souls for damnation. So it is that Fenway Park in the late innings of a close game can be churchlike in its silence. The faithful can only wait for God to do His work, knowing that it includes more damnation.

"I want to win a World Series with Boston more than anything else," Martinez says. "I'd rather win one with Boston than three or four with any other team. I've had so many people say to me they pray to God they don't die before the Red Sox win the World Series. But after that, they're satisfied, they can die."

The Yankees made Martinez exert himself in the seventh. Jason Giambi hit his second homer of the night to cut the lead to 4–2. Enrique Wilson and Garcia followed with singles. Martinez gamely fanned Alfonso Soriano, though it took a grueling six-pitch at bat to do so. He had thrown 100 pitches. As he walked off the mound, Martinez gave thanks to God by pointing to the sky, his usual coda to a full night's work.

In the far end of the dugout Garciaparra threw his arms around Martinez, a gesture of appreciation for his effort. At the other end of the dugout pitching coach Dave Wallace pulled his pitching log notebook from his pocket, scratched out Martinez's name and, with the lefthanded Johnson due up next inning, wrote in the name of lefthanded reliever Alan Embree.

"After the seventh," Martinez says, "Chris and Wallace told me that was pretty much it. They were going to talk to Grady."

For a moment, Martinez figured he was done. And such a moment is all it takes to trigger the shutdown of a pitcher's competitive systems. Rebooting is never easy.

"Your energy level drops," Martinez says. "As soon as you think you're out, even for 30 seconds, you get tired and out of focus."

Martinez was getting ready to leave for the clubhouse with Correnti when manager Grady Little approached him. According to Martinez, Little told him, "I need you for one more [inning]. Can you give me one more?"

"I didn't know what to say," Martinez says. "If anything happens, everyone will say, 'Pedro wanted to come out.'

"I wasn't hurt. I was tired, yes. I never expressed anything about coming out. The only way I would say that is if I was physically hurt. The only way."

So Martinez told Little he would try to give him another inning. Little, sensing Martinez's fatigue, decided on a backup plan.

"I'll tell you what, Petey," Martinez says Little told him. "Why don't you try to start the eighth. I might even send you out there just to warm up."

The implication was that Embree would be summoned at any sign of distress, even if it occurred as Martinez threw his warmup pitches.

"Help is on the way," Little told Martinez.

Says Martinez, "At that point, I thought I was batter by batter"—that he would be removed if a runner reached base.

David Ortiz gave Boston another run to spare with a homer off David Wells in the top of the eighth. Martinez, the game more secure, marched back to the mound with a 5–2 lead.

"I was a little fatigued," he says. "But I did not believe I was giving up that lead. That had never happened to me. You might as well be up 10 runs instead of three—that's what it seemed like to me. We had enough to win."

Little, then 53, slightly plump, twinkle-eyed and gray-haired, speaks slowly in a soft voice with a lilting Southern accent. He was Central Casting's version of a big league manager, known to be popular with his players. Indeed, when Red Sox CEO Larry Lucchino had introduced Little, a former Boston coach, as manager during a hastily called team meeting in spring training 19 months before, a happy Martinez had celebrated in front of Little with a raunchy jig in the nude.

As Martinez tossed his eighth-inning warmup pitches, Embree threw in the bullpen. Mike Timlin and Scott Williamson were available too. The three relievers had dominated New York throughout the series, allowing only one run in 11⅓ innings and just five hits in 36 at bats. Little would later tell club officials that, as well as the trio had pitched, he did not trust them to keep their nerves under control in such a pressurized spot. He trusted no one more than Martinez.

Little preferred a fatigued Martinez to any of the fresh relievers, and not just to start the inning. The manager would make the same decision a second, third and fourth time when trouble arose in the eighth. "It's the way we've always done it," Little says. "Ninety percent of the time when we send Pedro back out there he completes the inning. He gets out of his own jams. I'd rather have a tired Pedro Martinez out there than anybody else. He's my best."

Martinez was about to leave for the clubhouse when Little told him, **"I NEED YOU FOR ONE MORE [INNING]. CAN YOU GIVE ME ONE MORE?"**

Until Game 5 of the AL Division Series against Oakland, Martinez had been removed eight times midinning in his 60 starts for Little—four of them against the Yankees—and only once after the seventh. But in a subtle bit of foreshadowing, Martinez had not been able to get through the eighth inning of that game in Oakland. Little had pulled him after two hits and used four relievers to secure the final six outs to make possible the New York–Boston steel cage match.

Ten days later, with a World Series berth on the line, the manager had more confidence in Martinez. Little was unaware that the quiet life he knew was about to end.

LIKE PIERRE, who doubled on 2 and 2, Luis Castillo made Prior exert himself. He worked the count to 3 and 2. No one was throwing in the Cubs bullpen. New York Mets lefthander Al Leiter, working as an analyst for Fox, remarked, "[Prior] hasn't shown any reason to have any [bullpen] activity. His stuff's the same."

When Castillo fouled off the sixth pitch of the at bat, however, Cubs pitching coach Larry Rothschild stood up from his seat in the dugout, picked up the phone and ordered reliever Kyle Farnsworth to starting getting loose.

Prior had averaged 113 pitches per start during the regular season, the most in baseball. Baker pushed him beyond that in the postseason. Prior had thrown 133 and 116 pitches in his

two previous starts, the most recent one a 12–3 win in Game 2 in which Baker sent him back out for the eighth inning with his team leading by 10 runs. Baker explained that nothing can be taken for granted in a playoff game. Now Prior's odometer had hit 234⅔ innings for the year—a leap of 167⅔ from his combined minor and major league total as a rookie.

"My bullpen was tired," Baker says. "[Mike] Remlinger's arm was barking like a dog. [Antonio] Alfonseca wasn't throwing the way he's capable. [Mark] Guthrie wasn't throwing like he usually does. [Dave] Veres wasn't ready. And then there wasn't a spot to take Prior out. It happened real quick."

Prior could no longer finish hitters. He would throw 24 pitches in the inning and get the Marlins to swing and miss only once. He would get two strikes on three batters and retire none of them.

"That's where the second wind comes in," Prior says. "I didn't have it."

Castillo fouled another pitch. And now it was time. The Cubs, the fans and Fox had enjoyed scads of dreamy fun—the Charlie Brown appeal of the Cubs and the Sox had prompted the other networks to scrap original programming and offer up reruns for the ratings slaughter—but now it was time to start restoring order to the baseball universe. It was time for humility and poverty. It was time for the Cubs to be Cubs.

In a span of 12 pitches (not including intentional balls), the Marlins scored eight runs, the Cubs used three pitchers, Waveland Avenue fell as silent as a tomb and Steve Bartman, the *Sibley* Cubs fan, unintentionally created such infamy for himself that he would have to go into hiding.

The beginning of the end was a foul pop-up by Castillo. Alou drifted across the leftfield line to the padded side wall and jumped to make a backhand catch, his glove just above the green railing atop the wall. He had no doubt that he was about to catch the ball. Three fans seated in the first row, their eyes fixed not on Alou but on the falling baseball, also reached for the pop-up. It was Bartman who touched it. The ball clanked off his left hand. Alou came away with nothing but anger.

By sunrise Bartman's life would become a nightmare. News helicopters hovered over his suburban home; his phone had to be disconnected; he could not go to the consulting firm where he worked; the domain names stevebartman.com, .net and .org all had been claimed; writers for Letterman and Leno were scribbling Bartman jokes as fast as they could; people were planning their Bartman Halloween costumes; and actor Kevin James was preparing a pitch for a movie titled *Fan Interference*. A Chicago alderman, Tom Allen, told the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "He better get a new address. He ought to move to Alaska." Florida governor Jeb Bush offered Bartman asylum.

In a statement read by his brother-in-law, Bartman apologized the next day "from the bottom of this Cubs fan's broken heart." He never made a public appearance thereafter. He spoke with MacPhail and briefly maintained private correspondence with baseball commissioner Bud Selig.

"That's not what lost it for us," Baker says. "We had our chances."

And then Baker speaks what passes for the Nicene Creed of the Cubs' and the Red Sox' congregations: "Maybe it was just not meant to be."

All hell broke loose. Not only did Prior walk Castillo with the next pitch, but the ball got by catcher Paul Bako, allowing Pierre to advance to third.

Rothschild visited Prior. Stadium security officers visited Bartman. Both meetings concerned plots for emergency escapes. Only one succeeded.

Now fatigue owned Prior. He tried a breaking ball with his next pitch, to Ivan Rodriguez, but it had none of the snap or tight spin of those from the early innings. The pitch rolled more than it broke, and Rodriguez hammered it, but foul. Prior muscled a fastball past the Marlins catcher on his next pitch. Then he returned to the breaking ball at 0 and 2. Again, he did not have the arm strength to finish off the pitch with the proper snap. It hung over the plate, and this time Rodriguez drilled it fair for a run-scoring single.

"Even when we were winning last year," Prior says, "People were BRINGING UP 1908 OR 1984 OR 1969 OVER AND OVER AGAIN. IT WEARS ON YOU."

"That's what sticks with me," Prior says. "The pitch to Rodriguez. I felt that I hung it. That pitch has got to be down in the dirt. If I get that pitch down maybe he grounds out. I think that's the one pitch that bothers me. Late in the game it's not your velocity that goes. It's your location."

Miguel Cabrera pounded the next pitch into the hardpan in front of home plate. Shortstop Alex Gonzalez moved to his backhand while thinking about starting a double play. The baseball bounced again on the infield dirt, only this time, propelled by topspin, it seemed to accelerate, and it was quicker than Gonzalez's hands. The ball clunked off the heel of his glove.

"The ball just ate me up," Gonzalez says. "I don't think I hurried it as much as it was the ball got on me so fast."

Even though Prior had induced a playable foul pop-up and an infield grounder, the Cubs still needed five outs. Now the score was 3–1, the bases were filled with Marlins and the air was filled with dread. Florida first baseman Derrek Lee, 3 for 25 in the series, was the hitter. The Cubs' scouting report said to pound Lee on the hands with fastballs, and the pitchers had done so successfully almost without exception. Lee's bat had not been quick enough against Chicago's steady diet of power.

Lee told himself to look for something hard inside. Prior wasn't about to deviate from the report at a time like this. Bako called for an inside fastball, and Prior unleashed a 95-mph screamer. Again, however, Prior missed slightly with his location. It was a decent pitch, just not far enough inside, especially to a hitter looking in that area. Lee smoked a line drive into leftfield, good for a game-tying, two-run double. Baker was out of the dugout to pull Prior even before the baseball was returned to the pitcher.

The bullpen could not stem this mud slide of a rally. An intentional walk, a sacrifice fly to break the tie, another intentional walk, a three-run double, a run-scoring single . . . and it was 8–3 before you could say 1908. The next night, in Game 7, the Marlins would rake Kerry Wood for seven runs ("I choked," Wood would say) in a pennant-clinching 9–6 win, a score that seemed to mock the Cubs' congregation. Year 96 of the wait had officially begun.

BACK IN New York for the final leg of the ALCS, Martinez did not leave his hotel room. He finally got some sleep before Game 7, and not long after he woke up, he ate lunch in his room. A friend brought Dominican food to him. He watched some television to kill time, then made sure to take the team bus to the ballpark. He wasn't comfortable taking a taxi.

"People said I should be in jail because of the Zimmer stuff," Martinez says. "The fans were saying they were going to bring rocks and batteries. Ramon [Martinez, his brother] wanted to come, but I said, 'Stay in Boston. Anything could happen.' "

Burkett, knowing this was likely to be his final season, had toted a video camera throughout the playoffs. The tape was rolling in the clubhouse before Game 7. One of his favorite images, taken unobtrusively, is of Martinez, sitting alone, facing into his locker, his face taut with concentration and anxious anticipation.

Clemens and Martinez had combined for 476 wins, second most ever for two Game 7 starters. Clemens would be gone in the fourth, down 4–0 and leaving a no-outs and first-and-third mess. Mike Mussina, having never pitched in relief in his 400-game pro career, escaped with a strikeout and a double-play grounder.

Out by out, Martinez drew Boston closer to the finish. The Red Sox paradox is that each out brings the club as close to infamy as it does to fulfillment.

"As Game 7 was going on, the drama kept building," Burkett says. "You have people on our team thinking, I don't want to be the one to make the mistake. You know, the Bill Buckner thing. I'm sure it entered people's minds."

After Johnson popped up for the first out of the eighth, Martinez jumped ahead of Derek Jeter, 0 and 2, with fastballs. Catcher Jason Varitek called for another fastball, wanting it so far out of the strike zone that he was nearly standing when he gave the target. Martinez threw to the spot, up and away, but Jeter smacked the pitch to rightfield on a line. Rightfielder Trot Nixon misjudged the ball, and by the time he realized his mistake it was too late. It sailed over his head for a double.

In the immediate aftermath of the game, one of the Red Sox players would grab a reporter and ask, "Was Jeter's ball catchable?" Told that it was, he sighed, crestfallen, "I thought so."

Embree was still throwing in the bullpen, but with switch-hitting Bernie Williams at bat and the lefthanded Matsui on deck, no help came for Martinez. Fox analyst Tim McCarver noted, "You get the feeling [Embree] will be the pitcher against Matsui one way or the other."

Martinez worked to a two-strike count again, this time 2 and 2, and again could not finish off the hitter. Williams drove home Jeter with a hard single off a 95-mph fastball that caught too much of the plate. As expected, Little left the dugout and walked to the mound. Unexpectedly, he returned without Martinez. Writers in the press box above the field howled, "What is he doing?"

Little had left the decision in the hands of Martinez.

"He came out, and he asked me, 'Can you pitch to Matsui?' " Martinez says. "I said, 'Yeah, of course. Let me try to get him.' He didn't ask me about anybody else. Just Matsui."

Martinez seized control of the at bat with another 0-and-2 count, getting called strikes on a fastball and a curve. Varitek called for a fastball up and in.

"We've probably thrown Matsui 80 pitches up and in," Martinez says, "and he's never hit that pitch."

Again, Martinez missed slightly with his location. The pitch wasn't far enough inside. Matsui blasted a line drive that bounced into the rightfield stands for a double. The Yankees had runners at second and third. Now Martinez thought for sure he was out of the game. He had thrown 118 pitches, a number that he had reached only five times that year. But Little didn't move.

Recalls Burkett, "You have people on our team thinking, I don't want TO BE THE ONE TO MAKE THE MISTAKE. YOU KNOW, THE BILL BUCKNER THING."

"I was actually shocked I stayed out there that long," Martinez says. "But I'm paid to do that. I belong to Boston. If they want to blow my arm out, it's their responsibility. I'm not going to go to the manager and say, 'Take me out.' I'm not going to blame Grady for leaving me out there."

Yankees closer Mariano Rivera was throwing in the bullpen. The next batter was Posada. One more duel between the arch enemies.

Posada had loathed Martinez even before the Game 3 fracas. The two had exchanged heated words that afternoon, and according to Martinez, "Posada started screaming at me in Spanish. He made a comment about my mother. Posada is Latin. He should know, if you don't want to f--- with someone, you don't say anything about their mother." Martinez had turned to Posada, pointed to his head and, he claimed, yelled to him in Spanish, "I'll remember what you said." (Posada denies making any such comment.) The Yankees interpreted Martinez's actions as threatening to hit Posada in the head with a pitch.

Martinez is a renowned bench jockey who enjoys riding opposing players when he is not pitching. He takes particular delight in ribbing Posada, calling him Dumbo, in reference to the catcher's prominent ears. Posada tries so hard to get back at Martinez in the batter's box that he typically fails. He entered last year's postseason 9 for 48 (.188) against Martinez.

Once again Martinez forged a two-strike count. He missed with a cut fastball before throwing three straight curveballs, getting a called strike on the first, missing with the second and getting a swinging strike on the third. Varitek called for a fastball.

And for the fourth consecutive time the Yankees jumped on a two-strike fastball for a hit. Posada did not hit it well—the 95-mph pitch jammed him—but he did hit it fortuitously. As if by parachute, his little pop fly drifted onto the grass in shallow center.

Williams and Matsui scored to tie the game at 5. No one covered second base as Posada chugged into the bag easily for a double. A tremendous wall of sound rose up, the kind of roar that comes not just from the throat but from the soul.

"That," Posada says, "was the loudest I have ever heard Yankee Stadium."

Suddenly, Rivera ran off the bullpen mound. The Yankees' bullpen is a two-tiered arrangement. The throwing area is at field level, behind the left-centerfield wall, and up a short flight of stairs is a sort of staging area, with a small dugout and bathroom. Without a word of explanation, Rivera climbed the steps, ran into the bathroom, closed the door and, with the joyous music and noise shaking the walls of the stadium, starting crying.

"It was just too much," Rivera says. "I needed to be pitching, yes, but that's how awesome the moment was. I didn't want people to see me standing there with tears coming out of my eyes."

At that moment, Little was walking to the mound. He signaled for Embree to replace Martinez. In Boston, where more people were watching than would see the New England Patriots win the Super Bowl four months later, those who did not weep cursed.

After a combined 324 games—a record 26 against each other—the Yanks and the Sox were tied. Each team had won three games in the ALCS and scored 29 runs each. The next run would be the last.

Rivera, the sixth Yankees pitcher, threw three scoreless innings, a courageous marathon for a closer and his longest outing in seven years.

"Every inning we thought that was it for him," Burkett says, "and every inning we were like, 'Oh, s---, he's still pitching.' "

Tim Wakefield of Boston threw the last pitch, a knuckleball that Boone walloped. Boone wasn't yet to second base on his home run trot when Rivera sprinted to the pitching mound and collapsed atop it in supplication, crying once more. This time he didn't care if the whole world saw the tears falling from his eyes.

The Red Sox slunk wordlessly back to their clubhouse. Several players were crying. Once inside, Little spoke briefly, telling the players they should hold their heads high with pride. Relievers Timlin and Todd Jones also spoke, making a similar point.

Sometime later, amid the profound sadness in the Boston clubhouse, Little and Martinez shared a hug in a brief, private moment. Then the manager, a different kind of twinkle in his eye, looked at the pitcher he trusted more than anyone.

"Petey," Little said, "I might not be here anymore."

"Why?" Martinez said. "It's not your fault. It's up to the players. Any other situation I get the outs, and you're a hero."

And then Martinez spoke the creed.

"It wasn't meant to be."

The Cubbies and the Sawx exist not to fail but to try and try again. THEY EXIST FOR THAT ONE TIME WHEN IT *IS* MEANT TO BE.

PRIOR PITCHED in September and October last year with pain in his right Achilles tendon. After a winter of rest, it was no better in spring training. His throwing elbow throbbed too. He missed the first two months of this season. He finished 6–4 with a 4.02 ERA. When he looks back on Game 6, he likes to think the Marlins won it as much as the Cubs lost it.

"They had a good team," Prior says. "What happened out in leftfield, you wish it didn't happen. But they're not getting the respect they deserve as world champions. They played extremely hard. They kept coming at us with tough at bats.

"I remember feeling upset after the series. I was upset we lost. I wasn't upset with myself. I wasn't upset with Gonzo. He saved us runs all year. We just basically didn't execute."

After Game 7 of the ALCS, Martinez spent a few days sequestered in his Boston home, playing pool, watching television and reading. "Nothing to do with baseball," he says. He finally decided to go out. He went to the Prudential Center mall in downtown Boston to begin his Christmas shopping.

"As soon as I got in the Prudential, I was surrounded by people," he says. "Everyone just came up to me and said, 'We're so proud of you. It doesn't matter if we're not going to the World Series. You did all you had to do.' It really made me feel better.

"I was hoping we would make it and Chicago would make it. It would have been great for the fans."

Little, as he predicted, was fired. In an odd bit of cross-pollination, the Cubs hired him as a scout and the Sox replaced him with a former Cub, Terry Francona. The Cubs also signed Sox second baseman Todd Walker and on July 31 traded for Garciaparra. The Cubs dealt Gonzalez to Montreal, by way of Boston. Bartman, who knows? "Personally," Baker says, "I'd like to win it all and put him at the front of the parade, to exonerate him for the rest of his life."

In front of millions of slack-jawed, rubbernecking viewers, the Cubs and the Red Sox chose the same point in baseball time to reaffirm their raison d'être: five outs to go. But to those faithful to the Cubbies and the Sawx, what defines the ball clubs better than the catastrophes themselves is what follows. The franchises exist not to fail but to try and try again. They exist for that one time when it *is* meant to be.

In 1922, four years after the Sox had won the Series and 14 after his hometown Cubs had done so, Carl Sandburg wrote a poem entitled *For You* that included this inadvertent article of faith.

The peace of great changes be for you.
Whisper, Oh beginners in the hills.
Tumble, Oh cubs—tomorrow belongs to you.

And still they faithfully wait, Cubs and Sox alike, for tomorrow. They believe, God willing, in the life of the world to come. Amen. □

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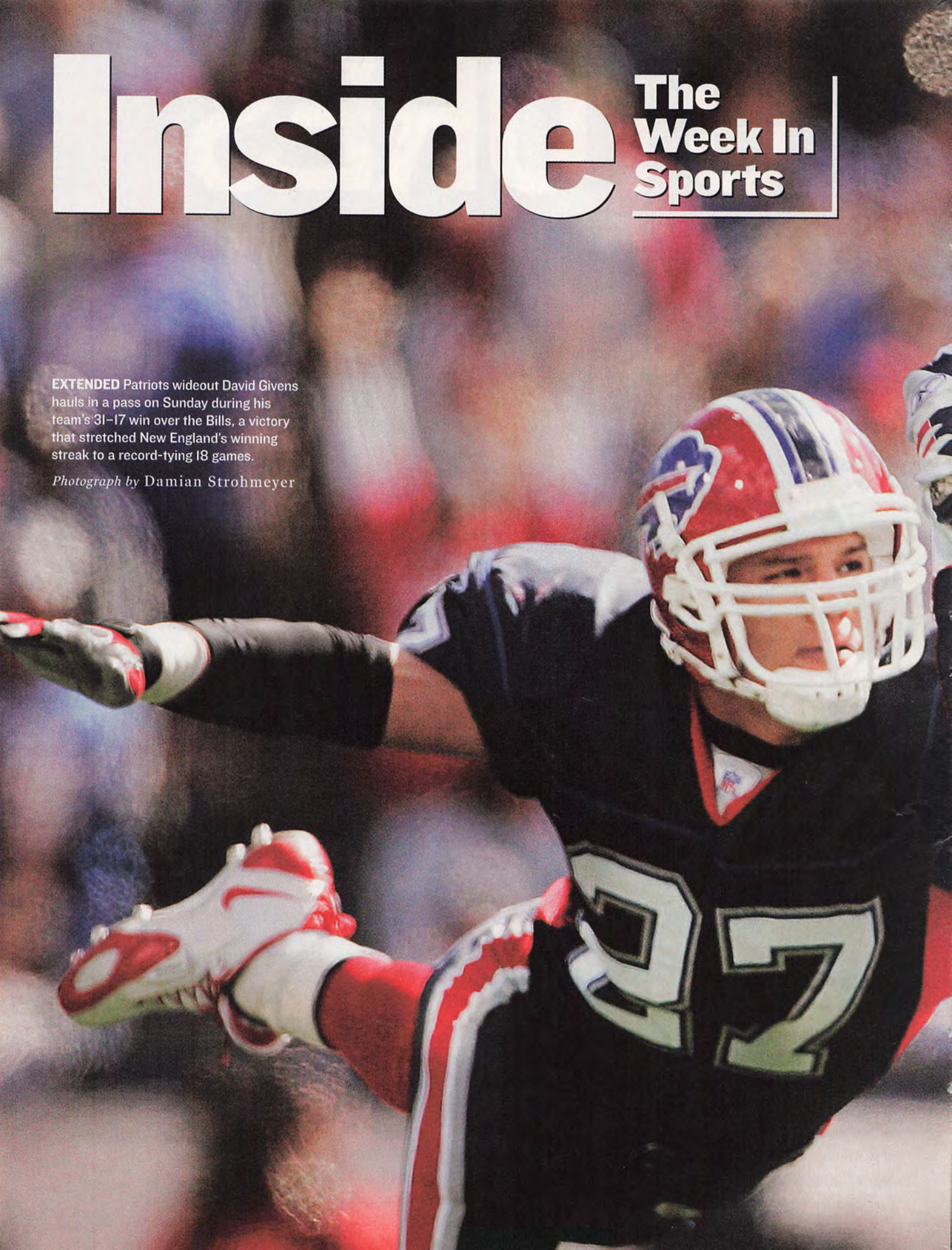
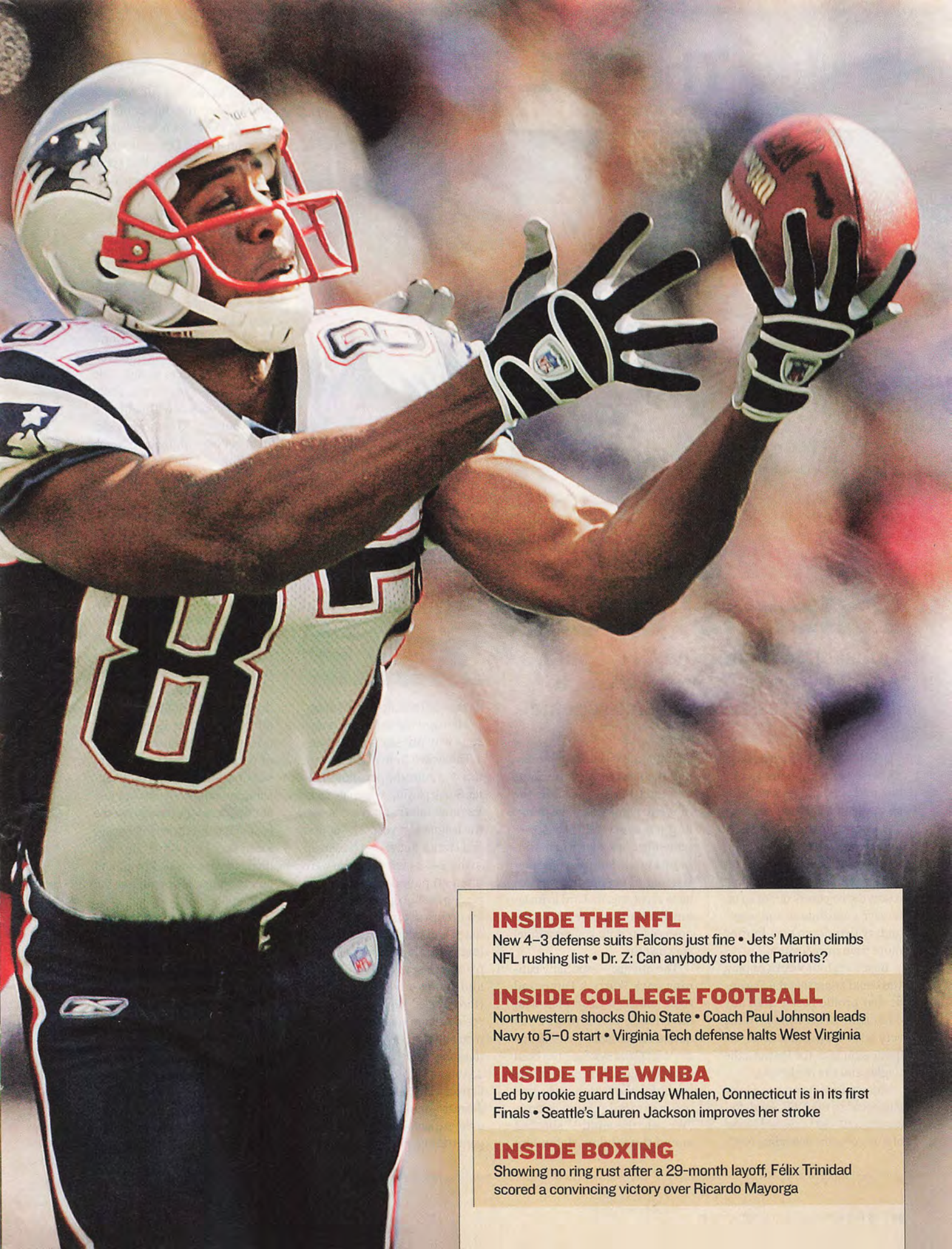
Inside The Week In Sports



EXTENDED Patriots wideout David Givens hauls in a pass on Sunday during his team's 31–17 win over the Bills, a victory that stretched New England's winning streak to a record-tying 18 games.

Photograph by Damian Strohmeyer



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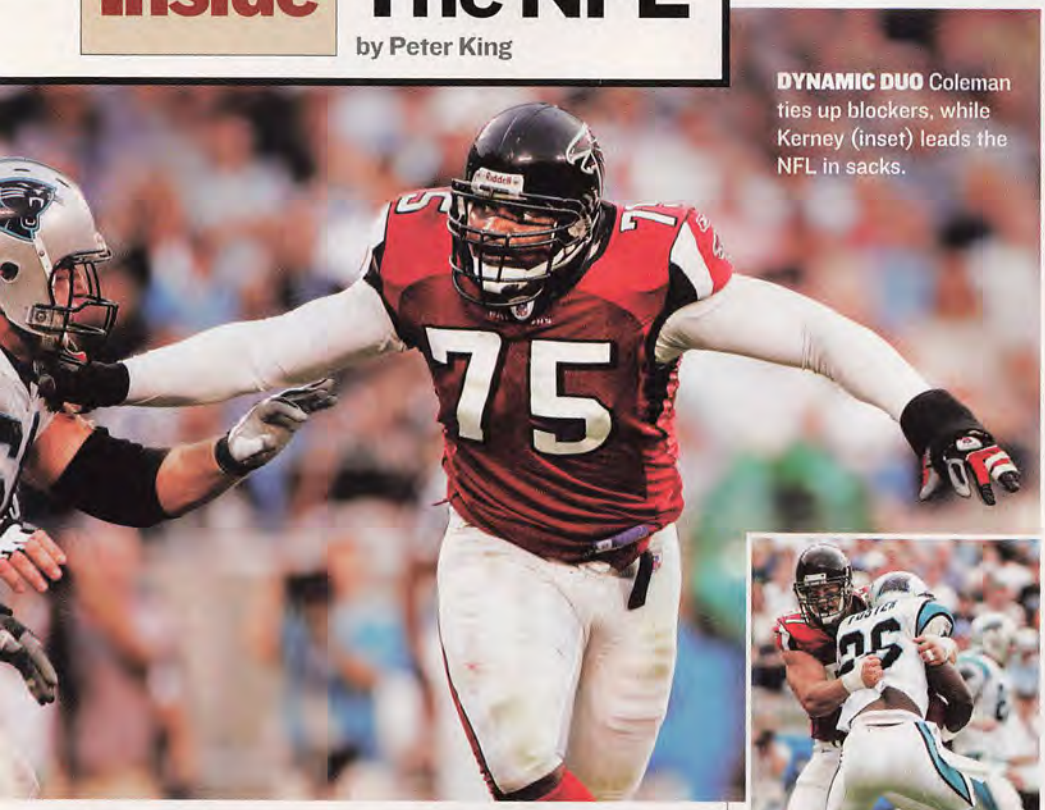
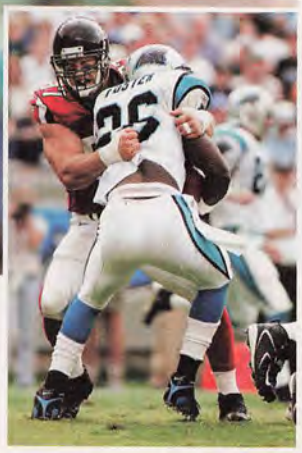


DYNAMIC DUO Coleman ties up blockers, while Kerney (inset) leads the NFL in sacks.



Falcons' Crest

Unbeaten and atop the NFC South, Atlanta is fired up by a new coach and an aggressive defensive scheme

TO WIN in the NFL these days, it's no secret that you need a mobile and accurate quarterback, an inside-outside running game, a physical and athletic offensive line, dependable receivers (including at least one game-breaker), a defensive front that scares the bejeebers out of an offensive coordinator and a secondary that doesn't get burned more than once a game.

Based on four weeks of play, you could argue that the Falcons fit that profile better than any other team in the league. At the very least they would be in the discussion with the Patriots, the Eagles and the Seahawks.

Atlanta is 4–0 and has a two-game lead in the NFC South following a 27–10 backyard brawl of a win over the defending NFC-champion Panthers on Sunday, and the Falcons play the Lions and the Chargers at home the next two games. Strange things happen every NFL season—remember last year when Minnesota missed the playoffs after starting 6–0—but the way Atlanta is playing, it's hard to imagine this team's not reaching the postseason if its key personnel stay healthy.

The offense—especially running back Warrick Dunn and tight end Alge Crumpler, who have taken on more work as quarterback Michael Vick learns the West Coast system—has been good enough. But most of the credit for the team's early success goes to an imposing defense. "We rule the South!" shouted one of the jubilant defenders as they left the field on Sunday.

Here are the three main reasons why Atlanta is unbeaten.

1. The switch from a 3–4 defense to a 4–3 suits the personnel better. Stuck playing over huge tackles on a unit that ranked last in the league last year, 273-pound end Patrick Kerney got beaten up in the 3–4 by linemen who were often 40 pounds heavier. Now playing on the edge with two tackles occupying inside traffic, the quick and athletic Kerney has a league-high seven sacks. (He had 6½ all of last year.) With Kerney and fellow end Brady Smith (three sacks) keying the outside rush, Atlanta rotates seven linemen and has been stingy against the run (3.0 yards per carry).

2. Atlanta landed the perfect undertackle in Rod Coleman. When defensive-minded Jim Mora took over as coach, he didn't have that penetrating, pass-rushing tackle vital to making his scheme work. So at the outset of free agency, Mora and new defensive coordinator Ed Donatell zeroed in on Coleman, who had spent the last five seasons with the Raiders. One obstacle: Coleman, who grew up a Giants fan in Philadelphia, wanted to sign with New York. On the second day of free agency he was at Giants Stadium preparing to shake hands on a deal when his agent called to tell him not to sign anything before he talked to the Falcons. "We got into a cussing match on the phone," Coleman says. "He told me to get to Atlanta. I told him, 'If you screw this up, I'll kick your ass.' " That night Coleman got a two-hour sales pitch over dinner from owner Arthur Blank, plus more money (six years, $27.8 million) than the Giants had offered.

The Falcons wanted Coleman to shed some of his 305 pounds; this season he's playing at 285. "And he hasn't lost any of his strength," Mora says. On at least four occasions in a Sept. 26 game against Arizona, the Cardinals blocked Coleman with three interior linemen. Says Kerney, "Rod's been a blessing for me."

3. The passion of Mora and the attacking style of Donatell rub off on this impressionable group of players. Enthusiasm pours out of Mora; the Donatell contribution is less obvious but just as important. "He brings out the best in us," Pro Bowl linebacker Keith Brooking says. "He's figured out what we all do well, and he's playing a lot of guys at the right spots."

Donatell's an interesting story himself. After building an opportunistic defense as the coordinator in Green Bay—over the last three seasons combined, the Packers had more takeaways, 116, than any other team—Donatell was the scapegoat for allowing the Eagles to convert a last-ditch, fourth-and-26 play in an NFC divisional playoff game last January. (The Eagles went on to tie the game, then won in overtime.) He was fired

AL TIELEMANS (2)

later that week. "There is no question in my mind I'd still be the defensive coordinator in Green Bay if that play never happened," says Donatell. "That was a real disappointment. But the way I look at it now, I was kicked in the rear end with a golden horseshoe. This has been a great place to land."

On Sunday the Falcons forced three turnovers, the biggest of which came early in the fourth quarter. Brooking and nickelback Aaron Beasley blitzed through the same gap on the left side of the offensive line. Brooking was blocked, but Beasley came flying at quarterback Jake Delhomme, who floated a pass into the hands of cornerback Kevin Mathis. He sprinted 35 yards untouched for a TD that gave Atlanta a 20–10 lead. "Jake never saw me," said Mathis, "and the blitz played out perfectly. It was almost too easy."

That's how things look to players on good teams.

MARTIN'S FAST START

Healthy Jet Takes Off

Curtis Martin left Pro Player Stadium in Miami on Sunday night wearing a white T-shirt, baggy jeans and a red baseball cap pulled low over his eyes. It was a fittingly youthful outfit for a 31-year-old running back who hasn't felt this spry in years.

Martin carried 24 times for 110 yards and a touchdown in the Jets' 17–9 win over the Dolphins. For the first time in his 10-year career, the usually slow-starting Martin has opened the season with three consecutive 100-yard games. "I feel as good as I've ever felt," says Martin, who moved into 10th place on the NFL's career rushing list, with 12,094 yards. "My body is refreshed, and I know it's because I put in a lot of hard work that's starting to pay off."

DURABLE Martin moved up to 10th on the NFL career rushing list with another 100-yard day.

Nagging injuries weren't enough to keep Martin off the field over the past two seasons—he has only missed one game since joining the Jets in 1998 after three seasons with the Patriots—but they took a toll. After the 2002 season Martin was slow to recover from injuries to both ankles and didn't start running at full speed until the following July. As a precaution the Jets played Martin only sparingly during the '03 preseason and limited his practice time. "Curtis wasn't getting the reps, and he's a guy who likes a lot of reps," says running backs coach Bishop Harris. "He wants to see everything a defense is going to show him. He didn't have that last season."

Martin still rushed for 1,308 yards to extend his streak of consecutive 1,000-yard seasons to nine. More important, he went into the off-season without a lingering injury and was able to start his conditioning program early. His daily regimen included running steps on a cliffside in Santa Monica, Calif. After training camp began this year Harris told Martin he could expect more carries because he was in such great physical condition. After three games Martin is on pace for 453 attempts, which would shatter his career high of 369 carries, in 1998.

Though he ran for 196 yards in a season-opening win over Cincinnati and 119 in a victory at San Diego, Martin had his most satisfying game of the season against Miami. The Dolphins

King's Corner

HOT TOPIC

Time to rethink the mechanics of replay again? The official in the press box decides what plays will be reviewed only during the final two minutes of each half, but a growing number of coaches want to cede control of replays to that official for the entire game. That's because in most cases, the coaches say, they are guessing when to use their two in-game challenges. "The challenge thing is a joke for coaches," Cowboys coach Bill Parcells says. "You're relying on blind faith [in the assistant coaches upstairs] sometimes."

Adds Vikings coach Mike Tice, "The league has broadened our résumés. We're coaching, substituting, monitoring injuries, and they want us to officiate? That's their job." One obstacle: Three quarters of the owners would have to approve a change to any aspect of the replay system, which is in place through 2008. But there aren't 24 teams that want the system changed.

MATCHUP OF THE WEEK

Ravens versus Redskins. The Ravens take the 38-mile ride from downtown Baltimore to Landover, Md., to renew what should be one of the budding rivalries in the NFL. But here's why it isn't: After the teams play on Sunday night, they won't meet again until 2008 and after that in 2012—when Ravens All-Pro linebacker Ray Lewis *(left)* will be 37. The silly scheduling formula doesn't take interconference rivalries into account, instead matching AFC and NFC divisions once every four years.

BY THE NUMBERS

Cincinnati's 28–17 loss in Pittsburgh on Sunday was its 42nd consecutive road defeat to a team with a winning record. The Bengals' last such win came on Dec. 2, 1990, when they knocked off the Steelers, 16–12.

THREE POINTS

1. I'll bet you a conch fritter that a year from now the Dolphins' Dave Wannstedt *(right)* will be the coach at his alma mater, Pitt.
2. If there has been a better all-around tight end in the game this season than the Falcons' Alge Crumpler, I haven't seen him.
3. Who's Terreal Bierria? Only the most-underrated player on the most unheralded unit in the NFL. The Seahawks' defense has allowed 13 points in a 3–0 start, and Bierria, a rangy, punishing third-year strong safety, is tied for the team lead with 17 tackles.

BOB ROSATO (MARTIN); RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES (REFEREE); ROB TRINGALI/SPORTSCHROME (LEWIS); MARC SEROTA/REUTERS

had held him under 100 yards rushing in five straight games—until Sunday. *—Jeffri Chadiha*

CARR'S DEVELOPMENT

Texans QB Comes of Age

"I see a young quarterback growing up," Texans offensive coordinator Chris Palmer said of David Carr, and that was *before* the third-year passer directed a 30–17 win over the Raiders. In the fourth quarter of games this season Carr is completing 72.4% of his passes (up 20 percentage points from his first two seasons).

In leading Houston to its first back-to-back wins in franchise history, Carr finished with 14 completions in 23 attempts for 228 yards. His fourth-quarter touchdown pass to Andre Johnson gave the Texans a 10-point lead.

DISPATCHES

Giants Ground Game Thrives

The Giants' 245 yards rushing were the most allowed by the Packers since 1983. New York's performance shows how well its beleaguered line has come together—and how sorely underrated Tiki Barber is. He carried 23 times for 182 yards and a touchdown against a unit that entered the game as one of top dozen run defenses in the league. . . . Playing in his 200th career game on Sunday, the Steelers' Chris Gardocki booted his 1,000th punt. He has never had one blocked. . . . Just days after rookie first-round draft pick Philip Rivers was promoted to the backup job, Chargers quarterback Drew Brees completed 16 of 20 passes for 206 yards and three touchdowns in a 38–17 rout of the Titans. Brees, 25, won't hold off Rivers for long, but if he continues to play well, he should make good money as a free agent in the off-season. □

Dr. Z's Forecast

The first thing you have to know about the record for consecutive victories that the Patriots tied on Sunday is that the NFL doesn't even recognize it as a record. The league's official *Record & Fact Book* does not mix regular-season and postseason numbers. Thus, for record-keeping purposes, New England's 18 straight victories amount to 15 regular-season wins.

The Pats must beat not only the Dolphins this Sunday in Foxborough but also the Seahawks on Oct. 17 to tie Bronko Nagurski and Red Grange and Big George Musso and all those other Bears who ran up 17 straight victories in 1933 and '34.

Can Miami beat New England and end the streak? I don't think so, but when a team comes in with a well-nurtured rage, you never know.

Playing at home, Buffalo seemed primed to upset New England on Sunday. The defense was flying to the ball and gang tackling and showing serious enthusiasm. It also didn't hurt that the Bills got lucky when Brian Moorman dropped a punt snap, picked the ball up and took off for a 34-yard run, setting up the second-quarter touchdown that put the home team up 17–10.

RUN FOR IT The Patriots can beat defenses with Dillon, who is averaging 4.9 yards a carry.

At one point late in the third quarter I thought Buffalo was going to win. The Bills loaded up with three tight ends and max protection for Drew Bledsoe and got some powerful running from Travis Henry out of that alignment. They dug their way out of a hole from their own two-yard line, moving the ball 41 yards, and I thought the Patriots were starting to wear down. But then Bledsoe overthrew the third tight end, Ryan Neufeld, and strong safety Rodney Harrison cracked Neufeld in the back, knocking him out of the game. Goodbye, three tight ends.

Miami has a good defense, but I don't know how anybody can hold down New England's attack. In the opener against the Colts, it was dink and dunk. The following week against the Cardinals, it was heavy running with Corey Dillon. And against Buffalo, it was bombs away facing a defense that sold out on blitzes. Supposedly, Tom Brady's weakness is the same weakness that Joe Montana suffered from, lack of the long ball. But there's no more unpredictable offensive coordinator than Charlie Weis, and he handed his quarterback a first-class ticket and told him to let it fly. The result was four completions of 30 yards or more. Some weakness.

The Patriots' defense can be bruised by a strong, committed ground attack; Indianapolis and Buffalo ran on it. No one has really tested All-Pro cornerback Ty Law, who looks as if he's off to a slow start. But the Dolphins aren't in shape to test anybody—on the ground or through the air. Unless the defense goes wild and forces multiple turnovers, I can't see Miami in this one. **The Patriots are the pick.**

On Monday night Tennessee versus Green Bay features the battle of the wounded QBs. I'll ride with the **Packers** at home. Ditto the **Cowboys** over the visiting Giants, and the **Saints** over the Buccaneers. The rampaging Chargers might seem like an attractive upset pick at home over no longer undefeated Jacksonville, but not to me. I'll take the **Jaguars**. But I've got my upset special all ready: the **Texans**, with a now formidable pass-catch game, over the Vikings' shaky defense.

St. Louis toyed with San Francisco on Sunday night, but the Rams will have a rougher go in Seattle against a very sound club that is coming off its bye. The **Seahawks** will win it on defense. Sorry, but I don't like Washington quarterback Mark Brunell against that Baltimore defense. The **Ravens** beat the Redskins. And the **Cardinals** get one of their rare road victories, this time over the winless 49ers. *—Paul Zimmerman*

Last Week: 6–4 **Season: 28–12**

SI.com *Dr. Z writes exclusively for the web every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at* **si.com/nfl.**

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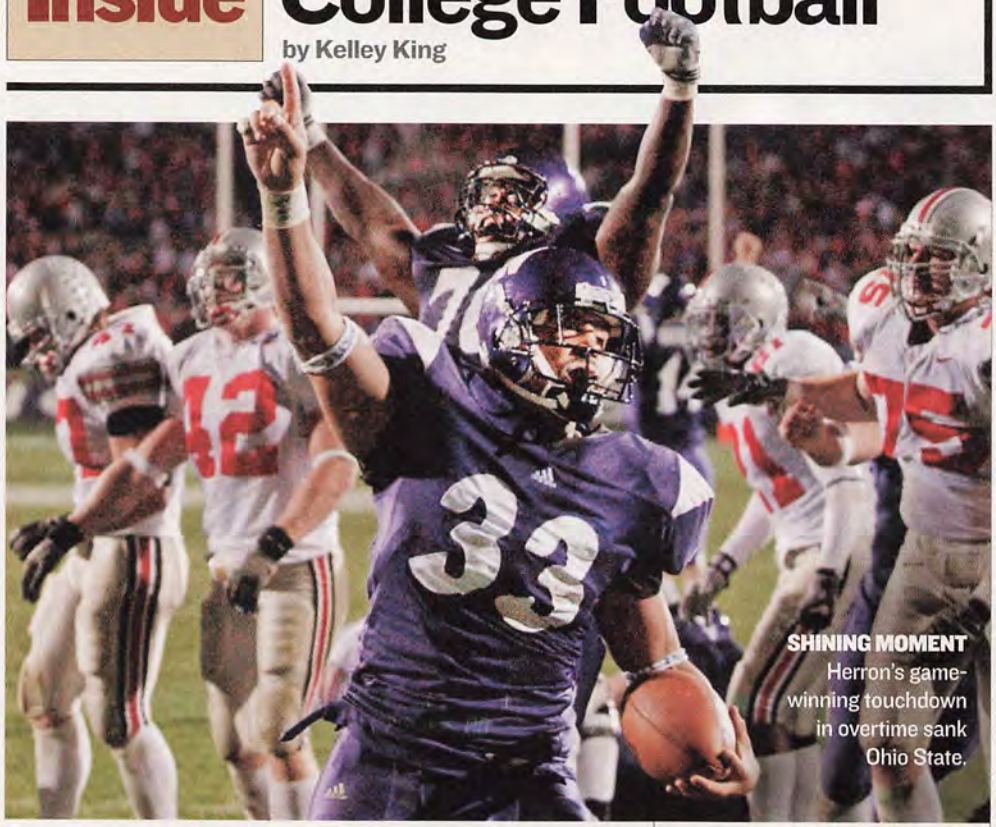
by Kelley King



SHINING MOMENT Herron's game-winning touchdown in overtime sank Ohio State.

Wildcat Attack

Led by aspiring doctor and former Ohio Mr. Foootball Jeff Backes, Northwestern shocked Ohio State

LATE LAST Saturday night, Northwestern junior cornerback Jeff Backes lay still on the Wildcats' 11-yard line. While he was being tackled on a kickoff return, his right knee and ankle had buckled, but with his team and Ohio State tied 27–27 with 1:54 left in regulation, Backes, an Ohio native, peeled himself off the turf and got ready for overtime. "Unless I couldn't walk, I was going back into the game," says Backes, who continued playing despite an ankle sprain.

Backes's perseverance helped unranked Northwestern shock the seventh-ranked Buckeyes, 33–27, in the year's biggest upset. The Wildcats (2–3)—who hadn't beaten Ohio State in Evanston since 1958—had been pointing to this game as an opportunity to turn around a frustrating season. They had suffered two heartbreaking losses, 48–45 to TCU in double overtime and 30–21 to Arizona State, and been embarrassed 43–17 by Minnesota. "We had had moments of special play and moments that led people to say, Who are these guys?" says coach Randy Walker. "So we zeroed in on executing and responding when we're down."

Ohio State, meanwhile, was due for a stumble. The Buckeyes were 3–0 but struggled at times, and behind inexperienced sophomore quarterback Justin Zwick their offense was ranked 80th in the country entering Saturday's game. Outplayed by the Wildcats for most of the game, Ohio State had to come back from a 10-point fourth-quarter deficit (an effort seemingly stymied with 4:55 left when Backes picked off a Zwick pass on the Northwestern goal line) to force overtime.

Though the Buckeyes had won four overtime games over the last three seasons, they came up short this time. Normally reliable kicker Mike Nugent missed a 40-yard field goal on the opening series, setting the stage for Northwestern senior tailback Noah Herron, who wears number 33, to find the end zone on his 33rd carry of the game, from one yard out, and push his team past Ohio State for the first time in—you got it—33 years.

It was an ideal evening for the Wildcats, 11 of whom grew up in Ohio. Backes, for one, rooted for the Buckeyes as he rushed for a state-record 3,354 yards at Upper Arlington High. But on signing day Ohio's Mr. Football passed up Ohio State for the school that he felt had a better premed program. "I also wanted to play for a team where I could really have an impact," says Backes, who has already been accepted into Northwestern's medical school. Backes made his impact felt on Saturday. Says Walker, "Jeff will be able to go home this summer and hold his head high."

NAVY IS 5–0

Up Next: Notre Dame

When Paul Johnson was named coach at Navy in December 2001, the Midshipmen were one of the worst teams in the country, having gone 1–20 over the previous two years. But since struggling through a 2–10 season in 2002, the 47-year-old Johnson has engineered one of the biggest turnarounds in the nation, leading the Midshipmen to 13 victories in their last 18 games. The latest win, a 24–21 thriller at Air Force last Thursday night, improved Navy to 5–0, its best start

Three and Out

1. It's a sham that the **Big East** will have a team in a BCS bowl. The top two contenders, **West Virginia** and **Boston College**, have lost to middle-of-the-pack ACC foes Virginia Tech and Wake Forest, respectively.
2. **Purdue**'s defense could ultimately keep the Boilermakers from winning the Big Ten. A week after giving up 30 points to Illinois, they beat Notre Dame 41–16 but allowed the Irish to gain 536 yards.
3. Louisiana Tech running back **Ryan Moats** is deserving of Heisman consideration. Facing the same Fresno State defense that held Kansas State's **Darren Sproles** to 37 yards, Moats rushed for 236 yards and four touchdowns. —*Stewart Mandel*

M. SPENCER GREEN/AP

since 1979. "It's great to have that winning feeling," says senior quarterback Aaron Polanco, who rushed for 71 yards and two touchdowns against the Falcons.

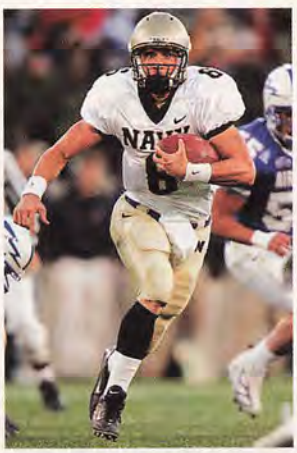
Johnson, who went 62–10 and won two Division I-AA national championships at Georgia Southern from 1997 through 2001, was the academy's offensive coordinator in 1995 and '96. (In the latter season the Midshipmen were 9–3, their first winning record since 1982.) Running the same triple option attack, Navy led the nation in rushing last season, averaging 323.2 yards per game, and the Middies rank eighth (267.4) this year.

The star of the backfield is 5' 11", 240-pound senior Kyle Eckel, a 1,200-yard rusher last season who has run for 387 yards and six touchdowns this fall. "Kyle's got good size and balance," says Johnson. "He's a big guy who's hard to tackle."

Next Saturday at Giants Stadium, the Midshipmen face their biggest test against Notre Dame, a team that has beaten them 40 straight times, the longest streak in college football. Navy has closed the gap in the last two years, losing 30–23 in 2002 and 27–24 last season, and a victory would be a huge step for a program that Johnson says is still "happy just to win a game." No matter what happens, there is no denying what Johnson has already accomplished. With the victory over Air Force, Navy all but assured itself the Commander in Chief's Trophy for the second straight year. (All the Midshipmen must do to retain it is beat woeful Army on Dec. 4.) Before the Middies won the trophy last season, they hadn't held service-academy bragging rights since 1981.

"The guys who come here are so special," says Johnson. "To see their hard work finally rewarded is the best part for me."

—Mark Beech



SMOOTH SAILING Polanco has helped the Middies race off to their best start in 25 years.

W. VIRGINIA EXPOSED

Hokies Help The BCS

Unranked Virginia Tech's 19–13 victory over No. 6 West Virginia in Blacksburg last Saturday may have saved the BCS from the embarrassment of having a major-conference team with a weak schedule finish undefeated and earn a spot in the national championship game. Playing in the Big East, which has been decimated by the defection of the Hokies and Miami to the ACC, West Virginia (4–1) has faced just one team in the Top 25 and probably won't play another the rest of the season. The Mountaineers' lofty position in the polls was so tentative that the Hokies (3–2) were three-point favorites.

Virginia Tech won with a superlative defensive effort, limiting West Virginia, which had been averaging 276.0 rushing yards per game, to 134 yards on the ground. The Hokies shut down running lanes and pressured Mountaineers quarterback Rasheed Marshall into a brutal passing performance (9 of 19 for 81 yards).

It appears that the Hokies, who have lost tight games to USC and North Carolina State, may be better than many people thought. "West Virginia isn't overrated," says Tech senior defensive end Jim Davis. "They're a great team. But we're not too bad ourselves." —M.B.

Phil Taylor's Sidelines

KICKED OFF

Placekickers are converting extra points at roughly the same rate as they did last season (95.3%). But it seems as though all of the misses have been game-changing, like the three that Oregon State's **Alexis Serna** *(right)* blew in the Beavers' opener, allowing LSU to escape with a 22–21 win, or the misfire by **Ryan Gaudet** that cost LSU in a 10–9 loss to Auburn two weeks later.

Coaches are at a loss to explain why so many crucial PATs have been flubbed, but it's worth noting that many programs have a surprisingly casual attitude toward the kicking game. When New Mexico coach **Rocky Long** was asked how the Lobos recruit kickers, he said, "We don't. We let it be known that we have a scholarship for [a kicker] and [a] punter. We normally get five or six walk-on kickers to try out and five or six punters." That approach isn't unusual.

Many coaching staffs are also ill-equipped to teach kicking mechanics. Kickers often get their technical advice from private kicking consultants during the summer, and during the season they are essentially on their own. When it comes to placekicking, many teams cross their fingers and hope for the best, which is why it shouldn't be surprising when they don't get it.

WOEFUL WASHINGTON

There are lots of reasons why once-powerful Washington is 0–4 for the first time since 1969 after losing to Stanford 27–13 last Saturday. Huskies fans would no doubt point to the instability and internal politics that began with coach **Rick Neuheisel**'s firing before last season for his participation in an NCAA tournament pool. But Washington's decline has more to do with misguided recruiting. The Huskies' 2001 class has mostly been a bust.

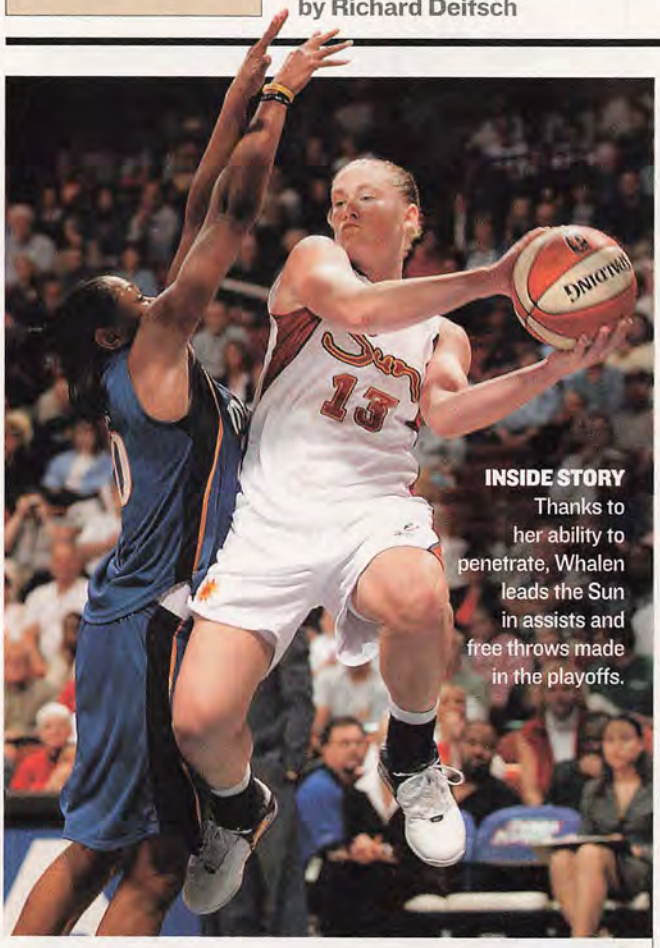
Neuheisel completed that class a month after Washington's last Rose Bowl appearance, and it was widely considered to be one of the top 10 in the country. But wide receiver **Reggie Williams** was the only player from the group to make a major impact, and he left after last season for the NFL. As a measure of how disappointing the class has been, Huskies coach **Keith Gilbertson** played 16 freshmen against Stanford. It's not the mistakes that Neuheisel made with his tournament pool that are hurting the Huskies. It's the ones he made on the recruiting trail.

SAN JOSE SHOOTOUT

It's too bad the ticket-takers weren't as busy as the scoreboard operator at San Jose State last Saturday. Only 4,093 were on hand to see the Spartans' 70–63 win over Rice. (The 133 combined points set a Division I record for a nonovertime game.) Down 34–7 in the second quarter, San Jose State stormed back in a wild game that featured 19 touchdowns, 1,089 yards of offense, at least 28 points scored in every quarter and eight players who accounted for 100 or more yards each. The Spartans scored the winning touchdown on a 28-yard interception return by safety **Brian Nunez**—proving once again that you win with defense.

JACK DEMPSEY/AP (POLANCO); GARY BOGDON (SERNA); TOM HAUCK/ICON SMI (WASHINGTON)

by Richard Deitsch



INSIDE STORY Thanks to her ability to penetrate, Whalen leads the Sun in assists and free throws made in the playoffs.

Whalen Away

Playing with a maturity beyond her years, rookie Lindsay Whalen has Connecticut in its first WNBA Finals

IN THE final days leading up to last April's WNBA draft, Connecticut Sun coach Mike Thibault held a conference call with Lindsay Whalen, the University of Minnesota point guard whose iconic stature in the Gopher State had earned her the honor of being the first athlete in school history to have her own bobblehead doll. Thibault knew that Whalen wanted to play professionally for the Lynx in Minneapolis, and who could really blame her? A small-town kid from Hutchinson, Minn. (pop. 13,000), she had concluded her fairy-tale college run by leading the Golden Gophers to a 25–9 record and their first Final Four appearance. Her number 13 jersey was worn by little girls all over the Twin Cities area, and the Gophers' average attendance had increased from 1,087 a game in her freshman year to 9,866 in 2003–04. Local newspapers had a name for the increase: the Whalen Effect.

The trouble was, the Lynx held the sixth pick in the draft—two spots behind the Sun—and couldn't coax Connecticut into making a deal. Still, Whalen wasn't shy about letting Thibault know she was *very* amenable to a trade. For his part, says Thibault, "I didn't want to hear what she was saying. I thought it would be better for her professionally to be away from there. I think the expectations placed on her would have been enormous. It would have been the same as if Diana Taurasi had stayed in Connecticut."

Thibault held firm. His team needed a point guard, having dealt veteran Shannon Johnson in the off-season. So the Sun, which is owned by the Mohegan tribe and plays its games at the Mohegan Sun casino in Uncasville, Conn., drafted Whalen. The house has been winning ever since.

After a satisfying regular season in which she averaged 8.9 points, Whalen has turned up the heat for Connecticut in the playoffs, nearly doubling her scoring to 15.4 points per game. She contributed nine of her 11 points in the second half of Sunday's 60–57 victory over the New York Liberty in the Eastern Conference finals as the Sun advanced for the first time to the WNBA Finals, which begin on Friday. "Connecticut is well coached, they execute and they guard you," says Liberty interim coach Pat Coyle. "I wouldn't be surprised if they won it all."

Expect Whalen, with her darting, penetrating style, to be in the middle of things if that happens. In the Sun's Round 1 matchup against Washington, she made 28 of 30 free throws in three games, including 15 of 16 in Game 2. She has also led the team in assists during the playoffs, with 4.6 per game.

Whalen calls herself "a work in progress," and it's clear she has progressed nicely. "If I had stayed in Minnesota, who knows what would have happened," she says. "There might have been a lot of pressure on me. I've just really enjoyed the opportunity to get to know a different area and different people. And they have great seafood here. I mean, you can't get that kind of lobster in Minnesota."

LAUREN JACKSON: MVP?

Center of The Storm

Seattle center Lauren Jackson, last year's WNBA MVP, has made herself even more valuable this year, thanks to her improved three-point shooting. At week's end the 6' 5" Jackson had made seven of 10 shots from three-point range in the postseason, including a 2-for-2 performance on Sunday while scoring a game-high 23 points as the Storm evened its series with Sacramento, 1–1. In the regular season Jackson's marksmanship from beyond the arc improved from .317 a year ago to .465.

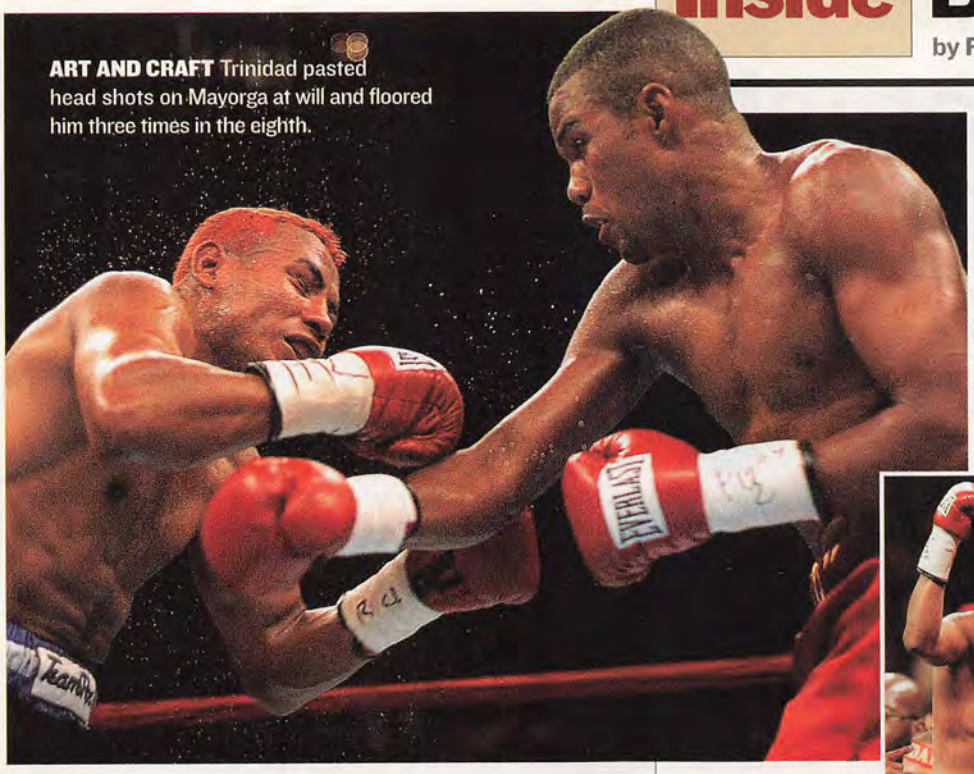
But don't get the idea she won't mix it up down low. Besides leading the league in scoring this season, with 20.5 points per game, Jackson ranked 10th in rebounding (6.7 a game) and third in blocked shots (2.0). "I wanted her to specialize in the low post instead of becoming one of those players who float between [power forward and center] and whose progress eventually comes to a standstill," says Seattle coach Anne Donovan. "Incredibly, she did that and still improved her outside game."

—Kelli Anderson

AUSSIE RULES Jackson won a second straight scoring title.

BOB CHILD/AP (WHALEN); GREG NELSON (JACKSON)

by Franz Lidz



ART AND CRAFT Trinidad pasted head shots on Mayorga at will and floored him three times in the eighth.

Right on Target

In his first fight in 29 months, former world champ Félix Trinidad was razor sharp in a win over Ricardo Mayorga

IF YOU'RE wondering why Oscar De La Hoya's new reality boxing show has been on the ratings ropes since its Sept. 7 premiere, consider Félix Trinidad's rousing pay-per-view showdown with fellow middleweight Ricardo Mayorga last Saturday night.

In De La Hoya's *The Next Great Champ*, 12 unremarkable novice fighters punish and torment each other on what is essentially a bare Los Angeles soundstage. In the pay-TV bout, two ex-champs pounded each other in front of 17,406 wildly partisan fans at Madison Square Garden.

For Trinidad, who was returning from a 29-month retirement, the drama played out so perfectly that it almost seemed scripted. He had been undefeated before losing his 160-pound title to Bernard Hopkins in 2001 on a 12th-round TKO. Despite winning his next fight handily, Trinidad, unable to come to terms with Hopkins for a rematch, walked away from the sport in his prime.

Trinidad retired to his native Puerto Rico and spent his time riding horses, going to cockfights and ballooning to almost 200 pounds. "It was nice not having to wake up at 4 a.m. to run," he says. "I could do anything I wanted, whenever I wanted." Early this spring, what he wanted was to fight again. He missed the excitement, the parades, the fans screaming Tito! Tito! Tito! The money, he insists, was incidental. "He had enough," says his father, Félix. "But if the chance came to make more, it would not have been a bad thing."

The opportunity came in the ever-persuasive form of promoter Don King, who lured Trinidad out of retirement with a lucrative offer to fight Shane Mosley. But when Mosley was upset by Winky Wright last March, King offered Tito $10 million to face Mayorga, a malevolent former welterweight champ with a disdain for defense and hair dyed a shade of orange only found in a Crayola 64-pack. "Ricardo is insane!" gushed King, who likens him to Muhammad Ali, Rasputin, Mao, the "Archduke of Ferdinand" and Professor Irwin Corey.

At the prefight press conference the Madman of Managua offered to bet his opponent $100,000 that he'd knock him out. Trinidad countered by dangling a contract for such a wager in Mayorga's face and daring him to put his money where his mouth was. Mayorga double-dared Trinidad to sign first. Trinidad then double-dog-dared Mayorga.

Things didn't reach the triple-dog-dare stage until Round 1, when the awkwardly fierce Mayorga dropped his gloves and invited Trinidad to pop him on the chin. Mayorga's punches came in torrents, and he landed an overhand right that dropped Trinidad in Round 3. Trinidad was never in real danger, though, and in the fifth he landed a wicked right that cut Mayorga under the left eye and marked the beginning of the end.

For the next two rounds Mayorga, his head jerking to and fro as Trinidad landed at will, somehow stayed on his feet. But the beating he absorbed was ferocious. A left to the body in the eighth sent him to the canvas for the first time in his 32-fight career. He was up at the count of nine, took a lot of punches and fell again. He rose once more, but with 21 seconds remaining, a left hook sent him to his knees, and referee Steve Smoger mercifully stopped the bout.

Both fighters were freckled with blood, but their bravery gave the bout a splendor you just don't see on reality shows. What Trinidad and Mayorga did to each other was something to behold. □

Short Jabs

Spooked by the failure of *The Next Great Champ* on Fox, NBC has pushed back the premiere of its weekly boxing reality show, *The Contender*, from November to January. On top of that, the producers of the series must contend with an even bigger problem. The results of all 15 taped episodes have been leaked and widely disseminated. . . . For his 20th title defense undisputed middleweight champion **Bernard Hopkins** is leaning toward fighting **Felix Sturm** of Germany.

JOHN IACONO; CHUCK SOLOMON (INSET)

Extremely Big Red

by Rick Reilly

YOU GO to a college football game. You find your seat. You stand and cheer. No big deal. But when you are Patrick Deuel and three months ago you weighed 1,072 pounds, going to a college football game is not just a very big deal. It's what you live for.

Deuel's goal is to be able to attend the very first Nebraska football game of his life, inhale the fresh air and "become part of that sea of red," he says.

That's a lot of red. This is a man who weighed 90 pounds in kindergarten, whose arms weigh 120 pounds apiece and who can't wait to fit back into his XXXXXXXXXXL Huskers T-shirt. And you thought *you* were Nebraska's biggest fan.

It's not going to be easy. Until June, the 42-year-old former pancake house manager hadn't been out of his bed in at least seven months. Hadn't been out of his house in Valentine, Neb., in seven years. (The doors weren't big enough.) Couldn't lie on his back to sleep because there was so much fat on his chest that his lungs couldn't expand. Couldn't roll over without the help of two or three people.

"He was terminal," says his doctor, Frederick Harris. "He was going to die."

For 14 years, Patrick and his wife, Edith, had been begging for help. Insurance companies he approached kept saying that treatment for his morbid obesity—partly the fault of his genes—was "cosmetic" and refused to help.

No hospital within 400 miles of Valentine was willing to take a man who weighed almost as much as the entire Nebraska defensive line. The Deuels were trapped. Meanwhile, adults and high school kids drove by the house shouting obscenities at Patrick.

Enter Dr. Harris, who refused to let Deuel die. Harris pleaded with Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls, S.Dak., to take Deuel, even though the facility wouldn't be able to collect the hundreds of thousands of dollars his care would cost. When the hospital said yes, the problems really began.

It took a specially equipped ambulance—one of only six in the country—to transport the half-ton man. When the vehicle got to Deuel's house, a local rescue team had already cut down the wall between the garage and his bedroom with a saw.

"Patrick was facing a wall not a foot and a half from his face," says Dan Gray, the man in charge of the move for American Medical Response. "That's what he'd been staring at for months."

"I was sure I was going to die in the ambulance that day," says Deuel. His skin was stretched so thin, a cut or a hernia could kill him. Lying in the wrong position could kill him. Edith was scared, too, but she couldn't be there with him because she had to work.

"They'd said their last goodbyes the night before," Gray said. "They thought this was the end."

Six strong men pulled Deuel onto a Hovermat—a mattress that floats inches above the ground on a cushion of compressed air. The mattress was lowered onto a stretcher that was pulled into the ambulance by a winch.

Then they drove four hours to Sioux Falls—"We couldn't give him food," says Gray, "but he never stopped smiling"—where the hospital had already widened the door to his room and laid a king-sized mattress across two reinforced beds clamped together.

Placed on a strict 1,200-calories-a-day diet, Deuel began losing a toddler a day: as much as 20 pounds. Tell Jared from Subway *that*. Deuel just keeps getting thinner. "He really wants to go to that Nebraska game," says Harris.

> If Patrick Deuel can lose another 334 pounds, he'll be at 350 and could attend his very first Nebraska football game.

Last week he was down to 684 pounds, which meant he had lost 388 pounds, which meant he could finally ride in a reinforced wheelchair (weight limit: 700 pounds), which meant he could actually be wheeled *outside* now. It was the first time he'd regularly felt sunshine on his face since 1997.

If he can lose another 334 pounds, he'll be at 350, which he hopes will allow him to walk proudly, on his own, into Memorial Stadium.

Nebraska had better hold a bunch of seats. Deuel and his sunny face have made so many friends, everybody wants to be there for his moment. Nurses, doctors, hospital janitors.

"My crew and I are coming," says Gray. "We love Patrick. He's a very smart, eloquent man. He's the favorite call we've ever made."

He's still a mile from pulling it off. "He's just getting to the hard part," says Tina Ames, a hospital spokesman. To help him live a normal life, Harris plans to perform risky gastric bypass surgery (stomach stapling) on him soon.

We college football fans whoop for and worship the athletes on the field. But just this once, could we stand and cheer for a fan?

After all, wouldn't it be great to go to a game where the goosebumps comeback victory happens *before* kickoff? □

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